NOTICE TO READERS. When you finish reading this magazine place a one cent stamp alongside of this notice and same to any postal employe, and it will be placed in the hands of our soldiers or sailors at the front. *No wrapping—no address.* A. S. BURLESON, *Postmaster-General.*

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January

# The Black Cat

1918

## Clever Short Stories

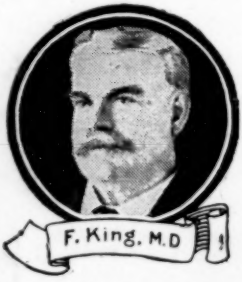
# City Physicians Explain Why They Prescribe Nuxated Iron to Make Beautiful, Healthy Women and Strong, Vigorous Men

## NOW BEING USED BY OVER THREE MILLION PEOPLE ANNUALLY

**Quickly transforms the flabby flesh, toneless tissues, and pallid cheeks of weak, anaemic men and women into a perfect glow of health and beauty — Often increases the strength of delicate, nervous, run-down folks 100 per cent. in two weeks' time.**

IT is conservatively estimated that over three million people annually in this country alone are taking Nuxated Iron. Such astonishing results have been reported from its use both by doctors and laymen, that a number of physicians in various parts of the country have been asked to explain why they prescribe it so extensively, and why it apparently produces so much better results than were obtained from the old forms of inorganic iron.

Extracts from some of the letters received are given below:




Dr. Ferdinand King, a New York Physician and Medical Author, says: "There can be no vigorous iron men, without iron."

Pallor means anemia.

Anemia means iron deficiency. The skin of anemic men and women is pale, the flesh flabby. The muscles lack tone; the brain fags and the memory fails and they often become weak, nervous, irritable, despondent, and melancholy. When the iron goes from the blood of women, the roses go from their cheeks. In the most common foods of America, the starches, sugars, table syrups, candies, polished rice, white bread, soda crackers, biscuits, macaroni, spaghetti, tapioca, sago, farina, degerminated corn-meal, no longer is iron to be found. Refining processes have removed the iron of Mother Earth from these impoverished foods, and silly methods of home cookery, by throwing down the waste pipe the water in which our vegetables are cooked, are responsible for another grave iron loss.

"Therefore, if you wish to preserve your youthful vim and vigor to a ripe old age, you must supply the iron deficiency in your food by using some form of organic iron, just as you would use salt when your food has not enough salt."

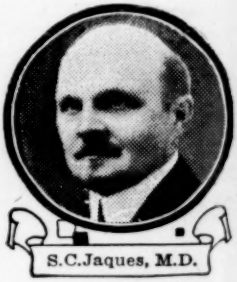
Dr. E. Sauer, a Boston Physician, who has studied both in this country and in great European Medical Institutions, says: "As I have said a hundred times over, organic iron is the greatest of all strength builders.

"If people would only take Nuxated Iron when they feel weak or run-down, instead of dosing themselves with habit-forming drugs, stimulants and alcoholic beverages I am convinced that in this way they could ward off disease, preventing it becoming organic in thousands of cases and thereby the lives of thousands might be saved who now die every year from pneumonia, grippe, kidney, liver, heart trouble and other dangerous maladies. The real and true cause which started their disease was nothing more nor less than a weakened condition brought on by lack of iron in the blood.

"Not long ago a man came to me who was nearly half a century old and asked me to give him a preliminary examination for life insurance. I was astonished to find him with a blood pressure of a boy of twenty and as full of vigor, vim and vitality as a young man; in fact, a young man he really was, notwithstanding his age. The secret, he said, was taking iron — Nuxated Iron had filled him with renewed life. At thirty he was in bad health; at forty-six he was care worn and nearly all in. Now, at fifty, after taking Nuxated Iron, a miracle of vitality and his face beaming with the buoyancy of youth.

"Iron is absolutely necessary to enable your blood to change food into living tissue. Without it, no matter how much or what you eat, your food merely passes through you without doing you any good. You don't get the strength out of it, and as a consequence you become weak, pale and sickly looking, just like a plant trying to grow in a soil deficient in iron.

"If you are not strong or well, you owe it to yourself to make the following test: See how long you can work or how far you can walk without becoming tired. Next take two five-grain tablets of ordinary nuxated iron three times per day after meals for two weeks. Then test your strength again and see how much you have gained. I have seen dozens of nervous, run-down people who were ailing all the while double their strength and endurance and entirely rid themselves of all symptoms of dyspepsia, liver and other troubles in from ten to fourteen days' time simply by taking iron in the proper form. And this, after they had in some cases been doctoring for months without obtaining any benefit. But don't take the old forms of reduced iron, iron acetate, or tincture of iron simply to save a few cents. The iron demanded by Mother Nature for the red coloring matter in the blood of her children is, alas! not that kind of iron. You must take iron in a form that can be easily absorbed and assimilated to do you any good, otherwise it may prove worse than useless. Many an athlete and prize-fighter has won the day simply because he knew the secret of great strength and endurance and filled his blood with iron before he went into the affray; while many another has gone down in inglorious defeat simply for the lack of iron."




Dr. Schuyler C. Jaques, visiting surgeon, St. Elizabeth's Hospital, New York City, said: "I have never before given out any medical information or advice for publication, as I ordinarily do not believe in it. But in the case of Nuxated Iron I feel I would be remiss in my duty not to mention it. I have taken it myself and given it to my patients with most surprising and satisfactory results. And those who wish quickly to increase their strength, power and endurance will find it a most remarkable and wonderfully effective remedy."

NOTE — Nuxated Iron, which is prescribed and recommended above by physicians in such a great variety of cases, is not a patent medicine nor secret remedy, but one which is well known to druggists and whose iron constituents are widely prescribed by eminent physicians everywhere. Unlike the older inorganic iron products, it is easily assimilated, does not injure the teeth, make them black, nor upset the stomach; on the contrary, it is a most potent remedy in nearly all forms of indigestion as well as for nervous, run-down conditions. The manufacturers have such great confidence in nuxated iron that they offer to forfeit $100.00 to any charitable institution if they cannot take any man or woman under 60 who lacks iron, and increase their strength 100 per cent. or over in four weeks' time, provided they have no serious organic trouble. They also offer to refund your money if it does not at least double your strength and endurance in ten days' time. It is dispensed by all good druggists.

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# The Black Cat

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## Contents


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Cover Design | *Olivette Bourgeois* | |
| The Black Cat Club | | 2 |
| When a Man Wearies | *Anna Brownell Dunaway* | 3 |
| The Kiser Construction Company | *F. W. Poole* | 9 |
| The Brotherhood of the Hills | *Chart Pitt* | 15 |
| The Elopement of King Nebuchadnezzar | *Eric Collin* | 21 |
| Efficiency—Plus and Minus | *Newton A. Fuessle* | 30 |
| The Wedding Business | *Elwood Brown* | 34 |
| Smith's Wife | *Howard Dwight Smiley* | 39 |
| Heel Marks of a Hero | *Ward Winchell, U. S. N.* | 42 |


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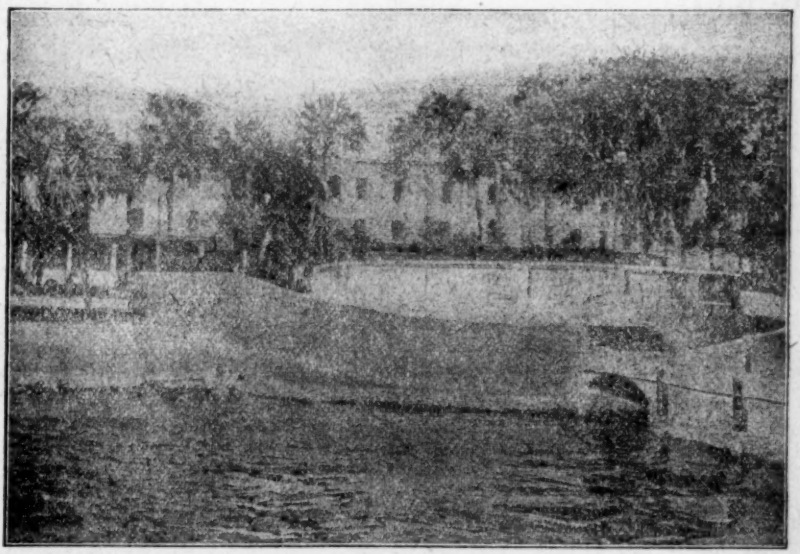

**HOTELS INDIAN RIVER and ROCKLEDGE, Rockledge, Florida.** Located 175 miles below Jacksonville, on the Indian River, in the midst of the famous Indian River orange groves. A great deal of money has been spent on the property, making the hotels equal to any hotels in the state. Fine hunting, wild turkey, duck, quail, jacksnipe and deer; also as good fishing as there is to be had in the state of Florida. One of our great attractions is the golf course, one of the best in the south. Boating, motor boating, clock golf, tennis, billiards, pool and dancing. Opens Jan. 5th, 1918. Accommodates 400. Write for circular, W. W. BROWN, Manager. Also Manager of Granliden Hotel, Lake Sunapee, N. H.

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# THE BLACK CAT CLUB

THE twenty-five dollar prize for the best story in the October BLACK CAT, determined by vote of the club members, was awarded to Frederick J. Jackson, author of *The Knave of Spades*. Prizes for criticisms were awarded to the following persons, in the order named: Miss Ida S. Matthews, St. Francisville, La.; Miss Harriette Wilbur, Duluth, Minn.; Philip Corrin, Los Angeles, Cal.; L. M. Thornton, Waverly, N. Y.; G. Lombard Kelly, Augusta, Ga.; Frank G. Davis, Richmond, Va.; E. A. Kirkwood, San Francisco, Cal.; L. S. Hutchens, Baileyville, West Va.; Herbert J. Maughiman, Columbia, Mo.

The originality of using playing cards to mark the graves of the three bandits and the significance of the open grave are the outstanding features of Mr. Jackson's story, *The Knave of Spades*. In reading it one can visualize the desert with its heat, alkali, cactus, and lizards. La Canada is a typical town of the great Southwest with its single-storied, facaded buildings and its one main street, dusty and lined on either side with wooden hitching racks. The story is good technically. The action is swift and continuous, because all antecedent events are brought to the reader's knowledge by action rather than in the form of a synopsis. The devices used to produce this effect of continuity are clever and natural: the stranger's riding out from the desert, his musings at the cemetery, and his joining the card game to learn what he wants to know of previous events. The viewpoint shifts back and forth from outlaw to sheriff, but this is permissible, since the author wishes each of the two men to win the sympathy and understanding of the reader, who, having become interested in the outlaw's project before getting the sheriff's side of the affair, finds his interest veering impartially from one to the other until Danny appears on the scene to swing the weight of sympathy to his father's side. The author's treatment of the old device of a little child's influence is most artistic; so skillfully is it done that the pathetic sentiment aroused does not once approach bathetic sentimentality. The "little human touches" reach the reader's sympathy immediately and so make the outlaw's reform a natural conclusion. To sum up, the author has covered all points necessary to a well balanced piece of fiction. The story has vivid atmosphere, suspense, appeal, characterization of the best sort, unity of time and place, and surprise. Another excellent feature is the carefully worked out repression. Many writers in using a similar theme would have become more or less hysterical toward the climax. *The Knave of Spades* is very well done from the highly suitable title to the most fitting finale.

Compression and conservation, two characteristics not prevalent enough in the expansive wordiness of current fiction, surround *Ann* with an atmosphere well adapted to the sordidness of its theme and setting. At the first sentence the story springs to the matter in hand. The reader is furnished with a vague suspicion of Mighty Knutesen's guilt at the very beginning. From the moment when Ann is standing in the rain by her husband's grave, with her big black eyes fixed on Mighty, the story rises step by step to a pre-conceived climax. Expectancy, keenly if not pleasantly alive, holds one interested from the conclusion of one crisis to the beginning of the next; while the characters, developed through incident, without unnecessary digression, are not called upon to undergo the inconsistent process of exchanging their horns for halos in a letting-down climax. Things work out as they do in real life, given the somewhat unreal situation of Ann's sacrifice of herself for a doubtful future vengeance, when from the first she had good circumstantial evidence to back up her charges. The story has flow and snap to it; and such little touches as "It was blackberry weather, and I pulled my coat up about my neck," go to lift it toward an originality of expression and save it from jerky, detective-story monotony of diction.

In *Kid Carter and Reform*, the Kid's desire "to go back to the old home town to smile at old friends and make faces at ancient enemies" is a sentiment which links the story's melodrama to the unclassified currents of human nature. The immoral obligation he finds himself under to make faces at new enemies also,—the town's reforms,—is characteristic of his type. The final surrender is as much a compromise with the inevitable as was the attempted alibi of the darky who sought to let himself out of an unfortunate situation: "Well, boss, I wouldn't have been dere if I hadn't er been dere, you knows dat yo'self!" Through all his moral backstepping we know the Kid will not escape being there, morally, in the last sentence.

(*Continued on page* 45)

# WHEN A MAN WEARIES

BY ANNA BROWNELL DUNAWAY

*Auntie Miller is still trying to prove a certain proposition, not related to higher mathematics. Facts that W. L. George would dispose of in a single paragraph, labeled "Case 67 B," provide her with material for a whole lecture.*

I HAVE noticed, during a long and somewhat checkered career, the proneness of man to wander from his own fireside. And I speak of the best of men too,—fathers of families, pillars of churches, elders, it may be, or deacons. Even such men are often tempted from the paths of rectitude to dwell in the tents of wickedness. It is but another example of man's mormonistic tendency.

Of course this statement has not gone entirely unchallenged. When I say as much to Henry he snorts indignantly:

"Are these men guilty alone? What of the woman in the case? Whenever a man goes wrong," booms Henry, with an air of virtuous triumph, "there is always a woman to match him."

All of which is, of course, quite true. There are many bad women. As some one, George Eliot, I believe, has aptly said, "God made them so to match men." However, I venture to say that one would go far to find any true wife and mother stepping from the path of virtue. Yet the husbands of good wives do so with impunity, and cover up their transgressions under a cloak of righteousness, such as tithing religiously even though owing the grocer.

So, after all, with all deference to Henry, I feel that I have the best of the argument. I have seen it demonstrated once too often. Which brings me to my story.

It was a freezingly cold day in late October,—the nineteeth, to be exact; I remember it well because the first blizzard of the season was raging,—that I ran over to little Mrs. Parr's, next door. I took with me a glass of freshly made peach butter from a big kettle simmering on the range.

Ellamae—I had known her since she wore pigtails—opened the door for me, her eyes red with weeping. Then she led me into the dreariest house anyone could imagine. A funereal chill was in the air, and an apparently untasted breakfast stood on a forlorn-looking table. Even as I set the peach butter down I noted the dingy tablecloth, the burnt toast on a cracked plate, the muddy coffee in the cups.

"Ellamae," I began severely—she knows me as she does a mother—"is that all you gave Norman for breakfast this cold morning? Toast and coffee?"

"Oh," she cried, breaking down utterly, "it's been perfectly dreadful; we got up late and Norman was so cross, and he spilled ashes, and the range wouldn't draw and then he wouldn't eat any breakfast. He said it wasn't fit for a p-p-pig!"

I refrained from comment, though I felt that Norman was not far off in his deduction.

"But that isn't all," continued Ellamae, sitting up very straight, a red spot glowing in each cheek. "Auntie Miller, I'm going to tell you. I can't keep it to myself any longer. I shall die if I can't tell somebody. And mother wouldn't understand. She would just bundle me over home. And I can't go and leave things as they are between Norman and me. I—I can't!"

"There, there, pet," I said soothingly, for she was fairly hysterical. "Now, just tell Auntie Miller."

But Ellamae only cried silently. And while she did so I looked about me and did some tall thinking. I noticed the cat was eating a piece of toast, buttered side down, on the blue Wilton rug. And would

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you believe it?—there were no less than five grease stains on that rug in range of my eye.

And there were flies—dozens of them—on the pretty ceiling, while the coffee pot sat squarely on the tablecloth of exquisite damask, leaving a disfiguring smudge. Then and there I decided to take Taurus by his proverbial horns. The time was come to point a moral and adorn a tale. If things were at such a pass between Norman and Ellamae after only two years of marriage, surely something was wrong.

Who was to blame? Ellamae was the most lovable little thing, as pretty as a wild rose and as sweet. Norman Parr had been fairly daffy over her ever since their school days. But Ellamae had hinted at something tragic. Another woman perhaps. In that case, well,—had Ellamae done all she could to keep his affections?

I am not one of those New England housewives who require their husbands to remove their shoes at the door, but I had noticed more than once that Ellamae's housekeeping could have been improved. She came of a family that was easy going in its methods; a family whom flies did not worry, whose screens stood open with impunity; a family whose members took red ants and grease spots and cockroaches as philosophically as they did the doffing of their flannels.

I don't know as I ever knew a better family than the Weirs, or one more happy, more cheerful or more contented. Yet it was a matter of comment in Westerville that unexpected guests had been known to find the coffee pot floating in the bath tub, and the family cat regaling himself from the butter dish.

Be that as it may, Ellamae's housekeeping certainly showed the results of this environment. Her pretty new bungalow was usually at sixes and sevens. It was not dirty;—Ellamae was personally very neat and dainty, and she had a man come every week to clean it, but it just lacked system and order and general efficiency. What else could one expect from one who had married out of the schoolroom, you might say, and who had been brought up in the Weir environment.

But knowing man's fickle propensity as I did, I drew a few conclusions as I sat there thinking. For Norman was a perfect bandbox of a fellow. He had been one of these immaculate white-robed children. A spot on his romper had given his mother more concern than the thought of his immortal soul. She was one of the kind who washed on Monday if the skies fell, and who swatted flies religiously.

Ellamae had thrown herself on the couch sobbing. I noticed that she wore an old house dress of a washed-out blue color. Her pretty fair hair was strangely untidy. I couldn't help thinking that many a washerwoman on blue Monday looked better than she.

"Auntie Miller," murmured Ellamae tragically, "I watched Norman as far as I could see. And, sure enough, just as he got opposite Flo Goodell's house, Flo opened the door, and Norman went in!"

"Well," said I, "what of that? They are sort of forty-second cousins aren't they?"

"It isn't the first time," cried Ellamae excitedly. "It has happened more than once. And when it's pleasant she meets him and they walk down town together. The catty old thing!"

"Wasn't Norman a little sweet on her once?" I parried.

"She tried her best to get him. But Norman never cared for her. She wasn't his style at all. She always called him 'Cousin Norman,' and their grandfathers were only second cousins. And now,"—she got up restlessly and peered through the window at the whirling snow,—"why can't she leave my husband alone? She has one of her own."

"But hers is fat and bald, my dear. And then you know he is away a good bit of the time buying sheep. He's down in New Mexico now, which doubtless accounts for Flo's excessive hospitality."

"She was always a flirt," mused Ellamae despondently.

"So she was," I assented. "I remember she told me once that she wouldn't be happy till she had broken up a home." Yes, I knew Flo well. She was the very personification of Kipling's Vampire. Such women do exist in everyday life.

"I know Norman admires her," went on Ellamae despairingly. "Of late he has been comparing her to me and asking why I don't get clothes like hers."

"Henry admires her too," I observed. "When you have been married as long as I have, my dear, you will know that men admire pretty clothes on other women. You will also follow my example."

"What is that?" she asked with faint interest.

"Train your husband's weather eye on yourself."

"But why should a wife have to do that?" she broke out passionately. "I don't look at other men!"

"But you might," I observed with the accumulated acumen of twelve years' experience in keeping Henry in the straight and narrow, "you might if Norman got careless in the set of his suspenders, if he didn't keep his hair parted, if he lost his figure. You see, Ellamae, a man is not unlike a cat. You must rub his fur the right way to make him purr. A woman must never wear an untidy wrapper in his presence. It has a tendency to make him look toward greener pastures. On the other hand a woman is not supposed to be discriminating. A husband is as much an Apollo to her in a bathrobe as in a Prince Albert. Such, my dear, is another phase of the double standard."

"I shall lose my mind if it keeps on," moaned Ellamae. "Auntie Miller, what shall I do?"

"Do?" said I, firmly. "Why, win him back. It's up to you. You've got every weapon—youth, beauty, charm. Even I, Ellamae, a woman turned—oh well, what matter—but over twenty-one, as the marriage record says, feel that I have yet power to charm the savage beast. At least Henry does not appear particularly restive. But, child—you won't mind my speaking plainly for I know I can help you—you are not doing your part. You are not making your home attractive. Now tell me honestly, would any man just gambol with joy at the thought of coming home to this?" I swept the littered place with my hand.

Ellamae flushed.

"Mr. Bodle was here only yesterday," she deprecated, "and cleaned it all over, and I'm sure he's thorough."

I sighed. Could I ever impress on a girl with her early environment, the necessity of something different? At least I could not now. She was too distraught. In the face of her misery I could not dilate on the disfiguring stains, the flies, the cheerless table. I found myself reasoning falsely as I took my departure that matters might adjust themselves. Still I felt guilty. I had dodged the issue.

And all day I felt twinges of conscience. I regretted not having set about making the place more homelike. Still, as I reasoned, there was an aloofness, a sort of pride about Ellamae that forbade one taking liberties.

Toward evening the storm abated and the night set in clear and cold. It was a night for cozy fires and crackling logs, for cheerful lights and the ruddy glow of apples on the board. I had a steaming hot dinner and had donned a crimson gown and was waiting Henry's coming, though he had 'phoned me he would be late. Suddenly I heard a light step on the porch and a soft, hurried knock on the door.

I knew it couldn't be Henry. He is always in the hall calling, "Nellie, Nellie!" almost before I've heard his step. Men are that way. They never seem to outgrow their red-top-boot days.

I ran out and opened the door, and Ellamae stumbled forward into the hall. She was as white as a Haviland plate and her blue eyes were wild with misery.

"Auntie Miller," she choked, "he has not been home today. All this dreadful day I have been alone. Of course, I didn't expect him home to lunch; but a half hour ago he 'phoned that he would not be out for dinner to-night, that he was detained on business and would take dinner down town." Her face hardened suddenly until, looking at it so still and white, I could have fancied that it was frozen.

"Well, what of it?" I managed to say unconcernedly.

"Do you know," she whispered, "I don't believe it. Norman never did that before. I believe she has coaxed him,—

that vampire, Flo Goodell,—to take dinner with her!"

"Nonsense," I began reassuringly. "You—"

"I feel it in my heart," she broke in calmly. "Auntie Miller, it has come to the parting of the ways. I want you to come with me. We will walk past the house. If Norman is there,—I am going home to mother."

Already I was getting into my heavy coat. Together we stepped out into the piercing night. If Henry should come,—well everything was ready, even to his slippers and dressing gown. I threw a backward glance into my cozy sitting room. Henry was certainly shielded from the deadly work of vampires.

We walked along in silence till we came to the Goodell house in the second block. It was ablaze with light. All at once Ellamae clutched my arm tensely. We were opposite a window that seemed to radiate light and warmth. It was a luxurious room with crimson hangings, cozy corners and an apparently unstudied air of homelikeness.

Flo Goodell, in a rose-colored gown, was bending over a chafing dish. I had never considered Flo pretty, though she had a certain gypsy-like coloring that became her well. But to-night she looked perfectly distracting. Say what you will, a woman is always at her best in the service of her household gods. A ballet dancer, pirouetting before the baldheaded row, has nothing on the woman whose bare arms, white and floury, are plunged into the distracting mysteries of household lore.

Just now, as Flo stirred a steaming concoction in the chafing dish, Norman Parr was bending over her hungrily. Yes, that is the only word that expresses it. There is no doubt in my mind but that the man was half starved. I'll admit I'd hate to go a week on Ellamae's cooking. But there was in his look something more than mere, physical hunger. A sort of defiant admiration that expressed itself in half-veiled, shame-faced glances.

But even as we gazed, Flo crossed swiftly to the window with a lithe, pantherish movement and drew the shade.

Ellamae spoke in a cold, hard voice:

"You see I was right. I am going home now and pack up a few things to take with me. But what—oh, what shall I tell mother? She and father are so united. She has a horror of divorce."

"Ellamae," I said firmly, taking a steady grip on the respectable horns, "you have brought this on yourself. You have a different man to deal with than your mother had. Poor cooking and poor housekeeping drive more men to drink than whisky legislation. Norman was brought up in an environment of exquisite neatness and efficiency. His home is a disappointment to him. It does not satisfy his ideas. Ellamae, this is a crisis. And you can only meet it by a re-adjustment of your home."

"What is wrong with me?" she gasped. "Mother raised a fine family and I do as she did. We were a happy-go-lucky family, climbing trees and piecing on bread and molasses if we wanted to. Mother didn't go into a fit over a few crumbs on her rugs. And she wasn't fanatical over flies, shooing them over people's heads and running to hook screen doors. And she had seven children and every one a credit—"

"And one dead from a safety pin in his lung, carelessly swallowed," I broke in ruthlessly, "and two from typhoid fever caused by careless surroundings and impure water. Ellamae, you can't deny it. These things don't make for successful homes."

We had reached her house now and we stood in her little sitting room which, after the scene we had just left, seemed dull and chill. Pieces of sewing were scattered here and there. A kitchen apron hung over a leather chair back. Ashes littered the grate. The shades were drawn crookedly and the draperies hung limp and uneven.

"If you were a man, Ellamae," I said pointedly, for I felt that the lesson must be driven home, "would you not rather come home to Flo's cheerful rooms than this? There stands your chafing dish. I don't believe you have used it in two years. There is the piano closed and dusty. Yet you used to play."

"But I haven't time now," she defended

drearily. "I do all mother's sewing and mine. The twins are in high school now and take so many clothes—"

"Let your mother hire it done," said I. "Norman married you to keep his home, not to be a dressmaker. Ellamae, do you want to win your husband back?"

"Oh, yes, yes," she sobbed, her hardness gone. "I would give anything to have our home as lovely as Flo's looked to-night. Perhaps there are better ways than ours. Mother was married at sixteen. She didn't have a chance to learn." She looked about with disapproving eyes.

"Auntie Miller," she begged, "teach me how, if it isn't too late."

"It is not," said I cheerfully. "And I'm going to help you utterly rout that 'rag and a bone and a hank of hair.' But now I must hurry back. Henry will by now have called up the police station. Don't let Norman know what you saw. Be asleep when he comes in, but in the morning have a transformation."

"But how?" asked Ellamae helplessly.

I was already moving about, straightening a shade here, a drapery there. I whisked the apron and half a dozen pieces of sewing from the chair backs. I dragged Sally, Ellamae's dress form, from her entrenchments. Going into the dining room I raided the table and under my instructions, Ellamae got out a blue Japanese luncheon set and a cut glass flower basket. Then I proceeded to the kitchen.

"Don't have burnt toast for breakfast or muddy coffee. Where is your percolator?"

"Why," said she, "I never use it. Mother says a coffee pot is easier. Here it is. I—don't believe I emptied the grounds this morning."

"Get me that percolater," I commanded. "And, listen, can you make corn cakes?"

"Why, yes," said Ellamae, actually smiling. "I believe I can. But I hardly ever do. They are so much trouble."

"A man requires trouble," said I grimly. "Be glad that you have one to take trouble for. Now have you any ham or bacon?"

"There's bacon," she mused, "but I always burn it."

"You burn that bacon in the morning," I warned, "at your peril. Broil it in the oven and get it brown and crisp. And need I ask you to drive out those flies I see up there on the ceiling? In conclusion—to quote our minister, don't forget to wear something pretty. A husband's artistic sense is highly developed."

"Let me see," mused Ellamae, her pansy-blue eyes bright with interest, "I might wear that blue empire. I used to wear it when we were first married. Norman was so appreciative then. I remember he told me once,"—her eyes grew misty,—"that I looked exactly as he had pictured his dream girl would look pouring coffee for him across a little round table. But he never says such things any more."

"Because the dream girl vanished," I said sententiously.

Ellamae made one last stand.

"It seems so silly to pamper a man like that. Mother doesn't. I can always see her in a tight, faded wrapper, her hair in a tight little knot and, maybe, a slit in her apron. But such a sweet, placid face—"

"Your father," I interrupted, "is one example of the survival of the fittest. While your mother is a sweet woman she couldn't have held one man in a thousand with those tactics. Now I'm gone. Let me know how the denouement comes off.

I was really exultant when I reached home, even if Henry had left every door in the house open, looking for me, and was, when I entered, swearing into the transmitter. I believed I had read Ellamae right. Having put her shoulder to the wheel, she would not turn back.

After breakfast next morning, I hurried over, and, believe me, there was a contrast. The house was warm and it wore a cheery, homey air quite unusual. I saw that Ellamae had used her best dishes. She looked at me and smiled. And pretty? It was just as well Henry wasn't along. Little tendrils of fair hair escaped from a frilly, becoming cap. Her blue empire gown revealed the softly-rounded throat. Lace ruffles fell over the white wrists.

"Well," was her greeting. "We never referred to last night. And Norman was so pleasant. He kissed me for the first time in weeks. And Auntie Miller, I am so enthusiastic over the change in my house-

keeping. You should have seen my golden coffee, and Norman ate eleven pancakes!"

"That is right," I approved. "Feed the brute. Did he by any chance happen to stop for breakfast with Cousin Flo?"

Ellamae laughed and flushed.

"No," said she, "I watched him out of sight. Flo stood in the door, but he only raised his hat and passed on. And, Auntie Miller, I've been doing a lot of thinking. I need some new clothes to combat the vampire. Since the scales have fallen from my eyes I can see that mine look homemade. Norman has a good income and I don't need to look dowdy. I'm going shopping, and then you shall see what you shall see."

I was pleased to find that the leaven had begun to work, that Ellamae was fighting Flo with her own weapons. A week of bad weather set in and I saw Ellamae but once. She was very busy. Through rain and sleet she shopped, visited dressmakers and attended domestic science classes.

The first day the weather cleared, Henry and I dined down town, and on our way home, about nine, I glanced into Ellamae's windows. It was a pretty sight we saw, Henry and I. Norman, in a dressing gown, his slippered feet propped up before him, was eating popcorn from a big, blue bowl. Ellamae, on a low foot stool, was popping corn in the grate. She was, as Henry feelingly observed, a vision of delight. Her gown of Pekin blue, one quite new to me, was protected by the merest apology of an apron. Ellamae was plump and rounded, and the coquettish white apron with its tiny bib made her look positively alluring, not to say dangerous, considering Henry. I pulled him away reluctantly and smiled to myself as I imagined Flo Goodell sitting alone before her fire with a tense look of expectancy on her face.

It must have been a matter of three weeks later that I witnessed the final act in this little domestic drama. Henry had bought tickets for the theatre. It was a Broadway production with an all-star cast, so I dressed carefully, knowing that the eyes of the socially elect would be upon us.

People were thronging in as we reached the lobby of the theatre. Just ahead of us I saw Norman and Ellamae. And it was very apparent that Henry had seen them too.

"By Jove!" he said to me, his weather eye bearing down on Ellamae, who had slipped off her cape and was standing, flushed and lovely, in a gray silk gown with a corsage bouquet of pink roses. "Some class to our little neighbor to-night. Where's she been keeping herself all these years?"

"She has just found herself," I said briefly, and stepped aside while Henry looked after the tickets. People were crowding in and I found myself wedged in behind a portly lady. I saw that Ellamae had been separated from Norman and was chatting with a friend while waiting for him to join her.

Just then, from my vantage point, I observed Flo Goodell step out of the crush and tap Norman on the arm.

"Ah, deserter," I heard her whisper, "why don't you come to see me any more? I miss you so these long, winter evenings."

For the moment I trembled for Norman, knowing a man's weakness, for Flo was beautiful in a clinging black satin, above which rose her gleaming white shoulders. And there was invitation and coquetry in her glance.

But Norman's steady gaze did not waver. "I have other fish to fry, Cousin Flo," he laughed lightly, and turned toward his wife with adoring eyes.

Just then Henry joined me and we started toward our seats. As we did so I, in my turn, touched Flo on the arm.

"Not cat-fish, Flo," I observed sweetly.

Henry had looked back at Flo admiringly. And the way he kept turning his head as we walked on was enough to nettle any woman.

"When you have finished gazing at the moon over your left shoulder," I observed pointedly, "we may make better progress."

"Jove!" said Henry, looking down at me with a quizzical smile, "what a woman it is!" And he squeezed my hand just like a lover. That is one thing that makes it hard for us women to deal with men as they deserve. They can be so adorable when cornered,—just like a child who is caught in the jam pot.

# THE KISER CONSTRUCTION COMPANY

BY F. W. POOLE

*To eliminate competition, a construction company adopts a "pay-when-it's-done" policy. Competitors vanish, but Trouble comes fluttering around with a setting of eggs that would shame the most conscientious leopard moth.*

MET him at a cosmopolitan eating house. I designate it thus because the proprietor is a Greek, the waiters are Italian, they provide good American food at reasonable prices and they call it a German restaurant.

In the day it is busy, noisy, commonplace as befits the age; but in the night it is, relatively speaking, a haven of peace and quietude, a beacon of light in the surrounding blackness, an oasis of warmth within the bleak desert of the street, where lone human atoms drift together and comradeship begins.

He reminded me of Tolstoi, and yet the resemblance was not striking. He looked as though he had recently been drawn into a melee,—not a barroom free-for-all, because that is vulgar and might give a wrong impression; and besides his visage was unmarked and its expression was bland and benign. Perhaps he had attended a meeting of pacifists, at which he had called for war—and got it; not the ruthless kind, but a gentle riot in which he had been hustled, tossed, rumpled, and had his face pushed ever so slightly to one side.

Among other things, he had been a steamfitter and a straw boss on a horse boat, and his varied callings had taken him to many lands. This I learned as we talked over cups of black coffee. I had insisted on the coffee because it is cosmopolitan and there is a hint of Bohemianism in its inky depths. I also called for cigars; and our host, who was nodding behind a counter, awoke to find one cigar in one box in one small show case. We smoked cigarettes. They were much better; they harmonized with the coffee.

A newsboy—he must have been lost—suddenly thrust his head in at the door and shouted after the manner of his kind, "Liner torpedoed extry," and disappeared as quickly as he came.

The proprietor awoke and went to sleep again. Distant sounds of city night life came too faintly to disturb our tranquility; but one of the ever encroaching tentacles of the war octopus had reached into our minds and held our thoughts captive for the moment.

"This war," said Tolstoi's percentage, "was caused by ambition. A little of it is all right, but too much of it isn't, especially if it's the wrong kind; and that reminds me—"

Then came the action that first made me think of the great writer. I possess the artistic memory, and I remembered reading somewhere that he did something of the kind sometimes, when he was making a prophecy or something. My new-found comrade of the road half closed his eyes, and smiling inscrutably, waved his right hand slowly over the table as though he were gently pushing back the hands of time or sweeping aside the garish, common things of life and drawing aside filmy curtains that held concealed some secluded shrine of knowledge.

"That reminds me," he said slowly, "of a man who kept a shop. Big one it was, did lots of work—rafts of it; and he soaked 'em for fair. Loafed his day work, skun his contracts; and it was a wonder round the shop how he managed to get away with it.

"The Kiser Construction Company they called it, though some called it the Destruction Company. Bill Kiser was the

big noise. They called him Kiser Bill for short. He was a great bluffer all right. Looked straight as a string, but he was as crooked as a cat's eyebrow.

"But one half the world never knows what the other half's pullin' off, and most of the people Bill worked were high-toned dudes that knew more French than their own language and weren't wised up to much of anything.

"And Bill was a pretty boy—when he looked pretty. His moustache turned up, and his eyes turned up; and when he turned his eyes up, he was fit to be hung in a ginney bedroom with a gilt frame around him; when he had a grouch and turned down the lamps, it was all off, believe me; you'd want to hang him down cellar.

"He had a foreman named Bethlehem Holywig, who helped him to get by a lot, though he wasn't much more than a dummy at that. The men could botch the job just as well when he wasn't around, but he came in handy in showin' himself on three or four jobs and chargin' a day for each. He couldn't pull the angel-face like Bill at his best, but he had his worst beat a mile.

"Bill had talent, but he didn't have sense enough to quit when he was winnin'. He kept at it because he loved a crooked game for its own sake. The only man that could put him straight and keep him there was the undertaker, and he hadn't been called in yet.

"Bill took an out-of-town job that looked good to him. Big job it was—biggest he ever tackled. He sized up the stock and then took Holywig out to see what he thought about the labor.

"'It's a cinch,' says Holywig. 'Nothing to it. We can throw it in in a month.'

"'About what I thought,' says Bill. 'Three months' time will about hit it. You see it's this way, Beth. That last little between-whiles job we did out in the woods, you fellows were goin' to throw it in in three days. I was gettin' wised up to you, a little, so I puts it down six days. Now, if you happen to remember, it took nine days to do the job and two or three more to finish it.'

"'Oh well,' says Holywig, 'I don't want you to lose it, that's all. Say, can't you get the contract to sign in your own office and turn it into day work? We'll spin it out a year if you want to.'

"'Oh,' says Bill, 'you mean the fadin' ink stuff like we pulled off on that simp friend of yours? No, no need of it. Better as it is; it's a cinch. These poor slobs has played a joke on themselves. No payments at all—not a cent till the last tap's hit and the plumber's finger marks wiped off.'

"'That's a hell of a joke,' says Holywig.

"'Don't you see?' says Bill. That lets out all these half-baked boobs around here. How are they goin' to handle a job like this without holdin' out their mitts at every story? Half of 'em would want to tap 'em for the payroll every Saturday night. They can't do anything anyway. They think a man's a professor when he can swing a pick, and they ain't got a foreman that knows a blueprint when he sees one. The job's mine no matter how I figure.'

"'Gosh!' says Holywig. 'It's a pip.'

"'Sure,' says Bill. 'When we get this through we'll have 'em on the bricks. We can chase every Goo-goo out of town, buy judges by the pair and jurymen by the boxful, do as we darn please, Beth.'

"'That'll be fine,' says Holywig. 'Sign her up, Bill, and we'll get right into it. The boys'll eat it up.'

"Well, they had hard digging at first—worse than hard, hard and soft mixed. They had cave-ins and men killed, but when they got the foundation in they struck a gait, believe me. The way the walls went up was a caution, but it was nothing to what they did to the records when they slammed the roof on. They had it studded, piped and rough plumbed while you were looking at it; and the way the lathers worked, spitting out nails like a gatling gun, you wouldn't think they were human.

"Then Bill's lucky star put the key under the mat and went out to see the neighbors.

"If he only had had sense enough to sub-let the plastering to a mechanic with half a head on him, he would have been all right; but he gets a gink from his own

bunch that knew it all and didn't know anything. John Cluck was his name, and he was an awful boob. He goes to work and mixes his plaster on the top floor, and Lord only knows how many tons of the stuff he had up there. There was only one way to bet on the result.

"There were no more than half a dozen plasterers in the building when it started, and I think some of them ducked; but anyway, down it comes and it didn't stop until it hit the cellar, taking every floor with it. The house was gutted. It was a holy wreck. The walls were started, and about the whole business had to be pulled down. All they had left was the first story and the cellar, and it took them a week to clean that out.

"It was nearly a knockout, but Bill couldn't quit if he wanted to. He was like the fellow that had the tiger by the tail—he was worse off if he let go. With all the money he'd sunk in it, he was surely up against it.

"Things began to drag. Whether they got reckless or the inspectors got more fussy, I don't know; but at any rate, they got into all sorts of trouble. As fast as the walls were put up, they fell down or had to be pulled down. And there was a lot of talk about men being killed on the job, and they weren't all Bill's men, either. Bricks are like other troubles, they fall on the just as well as the unjust. That bunch was getting to be a regular nuisance, and the inspectors were getting more ratty every day.

"There was one old fellow who gave them more trouble than all the others. Samuel his name was. They called him 'Old Sam' and some other names; but as you haven't knocked around town as much as I have, I won't mention them.

"One night Holywig goes up to Bill's house; and after the two had been tortured by some family music, they hustles the bunch to bed and opens a bottle or two between themselves.

"'Holywig,' says Bill, 'that job has cost more than it's worth already. We're ruined if we don't finish it, and clean busted if we do. It's taken about ten times the amount of labor we figured on and—'

"'What do we care?' says Holywig. 'It's day work.'

"'Are you bughouse?' inquires Bill.

"'Not so's you'd notice it,' says Holywig. 'You didn't sign no contract, and to prove it there's the document with your name on it.' He pulls it out of his pocket and tosses it over. 'I know how you like to tear up things,' he says, 'so I brought it over.'

"Bill pulls a heavenly smile. 'Beth,' he says, 'you're a peach. How did you get it?'

"'Somebody blew their safe, that's all,' says Holywig.

"'This is a big relief,' says Bill. 'We can make bums out of 'em, if we can only put the thing through; but we got to rush it or we'll be in the poor house with 'em, and I don't like to mix with such people.'

"'We'll put her through,' says Holywig, 'though there's no denyin' we're havin' a tough time. That old pest, Sam, gives us no end of trouble, and the kids has been pushin' the walls down about as fast as we put 'em up. We're short of everything. We ain't got enough sand, so we're puttin' dirt into the job; and the walls bein' too weak and the kids too strong— If it was the other way round, we'd be all right; but I'm fixin' up a hose to douse 'em. And that big, long-legged hoodoo, Sam—you can't do nothin' with him. But I'm goin' to bawl him out and throw a scare into him. Leave it to me, Bill.'

"Bill took a boat trip to quiet his nerves; and the next time he shows up at the office, Holywig comes in and buttonholes him.

"'I've been lookin' for you everywhere,' he says. 'Sam's got on his ear. I've soaked the kids and dropped bricks on their dads when they come around chewin' the rag; and we'd boom things, if it wasn't for that fussy old geezer.

"'I tells him them walls are goin' to stay up. Them ain't bulges; it's a swell front house. Then he says he'll make trouble, and I says we could make trouble for him. He tells me to go to blazes, and I hikes right up to your place. But you wasn't in. Now we got to slam it through and no foolin'.'

"'Can't you get him?' asks Bill.

"'That's tha kind of talk,' says Holywig. 'I knew you'd say the word. I've got it all fixed, nice dark spot all picked out. Old Sam's goin' to report Monday mornin', if the walls ain't down before then; and they won't be. I've got a couple of fellows to bean him Sunday night—'

"'There won't be no double crossin', will there?' Bill asks.

"'Oh, don't say that,' says Holywig. 'They're recommended by friends of mine and have always given satisfaction. They're gentlemen, Bill; they're artists. They put a man away like droppin' a baby in a crib. They never let a man know what hits him. That's the point, Bill,—clean work. I don't like brutality, never did.

"'And something's got to be done about the boys. They're gettin' restless. You don't know what I have to go through to pacify them. Only the other day, Grundman says he's gettin' sick of it. He's forgotten what money looks like. Then Hoofer says he knows what it looks like because he's got a good memory. He says he's had to sole his shoes with four sheets of sandpaper and can't stand Pie Alley prices any more. They've boosted beans three cents, and that lets him out. He knows another joint under the Bucket o' Booze; but they've skyed the eggs to fifteen cents, Chinese eggs at that—the yolk where the white ought to be. He goes to the Salvation Army, and, just because he's three cents short on a five cent feed, they gives him the bum's rush and fires him out on the bricks—and they calls that charity. They're on the make like the rest of 'em.

"'Then Gruber says he ain't workin' for his health. He's goin' to sue. Boglemann says the lawyers would get it all. The best way is to catch you in a barroom, trip you up and chew your ear off.

"'They're all right, Bill, the most of them, but—'

"'That fellow Boglemann ought to be got,' yells Bill.

"'Don't you read the papers?' says Holywig. 'He met with an accident, and it was funny, too. I borry'd a two-foot stillson wrench from the steamfitters and left it on a timber, and some clumsy guy comes along and kicks it off just as his nibs is passin' underneath. It'll cost you a hundred, Bill, but it's dirt cheap. If the gunmen's union gets wind of it, there'll be a kick comin'. That includes the widow's mite—fifty-fifty I fixed it with 'em. She's as happy as a lark; she didn't know there was so much money in the world. She only wishes she had a few more lives to give to her country.'

"'Couldn't you get Sam that way?' says Bill. 'It would be a whole lot safer.'

"Holywig sighs. 'If I've tried that once, I've tried it fourteen times. He always wears that fuzzy hat, and it must have springs in it. The only result so far is we lost a big monkey wrench I borry'd from the plumbers. It bounced off over the fence, and the kids swiped it. It cost me two dollars; and come to think of it, I never charged it up to you; you don't know half the sacrifices I'm makin' for you, Bill.'

"'We're runnin' risks,' sighs Bill. 'I wish I'd never seen this cursed job.'

"Monday Bill could hardly wait to dress himself. He was like a kid on Christmas morning, crazy to see what somebody had jammed into his socks. He grabs a morning paper and jumps into his Morris chair to read it; but in a minute all the joy goes out of his face, he looks up at the ceiling and howls like a pup. There on the front page was the story of an unprovoked assault on building inspector Samuel. The attacking party, consisting of two thugs well known to the police, had been repulsed by the 'aged but wiry' Mr. Samuel. It had not only been repulsed, but it had suffered heavy losses in skin and dignity. At the moment of writing, the miscreants were at the hospital being treated by the house physician, who entertained strong hopes of their recovery. As for Mr. Samuel, he had suffered nothing more than a shake-up; his hat, which had enriched the landscape for many years, had been severely injured in the struggle; and as its restoration would be a long and difficult task, its owner would be confined to his house for several weeks.

"'Holy Moses,' groans Bill. 'Was ever mortal man afflicted with such a bunch of

swine-brained boobs as I'm surrounded with? They've spilt the beans all over the shop and dumped me in the soup.' And then he sits there like a Chinese image, gazing into vacancy until Holywig shows up.

"Holywig takes a long pull at Bill's cut-glass decanter and, after helping himself to a perfecto, he sits down and lights up.

"'Bill,' he says, puffing away, 'by all the rules of the game, I'm the goat and get the razoo. But you know it ain't my fault; I hired the best talent in the market; and to say nothin' of the fact that you'd have to pay me up, which is out of the question, the chances are that the next man you hired would be a bigger chump than I am.'

"'He might be a bigger man,' says Bill.

"'Keep a stiff upper lip, Bill,' says Holywig. 'Things ain't so worse as you think. Sam's interned for quite a while, and now's our chance. We ought to have done it before. It's workin' like a charm; they're all scared stiff. Why, it's amusin'. That gasfitter you sent, he can screw a pipe together, and that lets him out; on the fine points he's like a kid. There was the fit leakin' like a sieve—he says you buy the fittin's at the five cent store, and they're full of holes—the inspector comin' in the door, and he wants to put in half a day huntin' leaks. Well, I hustles the boy down cellar and tells him to hold a candle or somethin' under the pipe to expand the air and hold the mercury up. Well, the darn fool gets the plumber's torch and plays it on, and he must have got the pipe red hot. There was the mercury climbin' up the glass two inches a minute.

"'I tells the inspector that it's tight, more than tight. But he says he knows that trick we're pullin' off on him, only he can't think of it for the moment, we have so many of 'em. And he can't pass the job till he chews it over.

"'I gives the whistle. One means get ready, and two means the bean stick. But the inspector says to wait a minute; the mercury don't drop, anyway. And he stamps a slip, hands it to me and scoots. He knew that if the job didn't pass, he would. Why, we're boomin'; the house is goin' up like the cost of livin'; the job's near finished.'

"'Say, Beth,' Bill broke in, 'you've eased my mind and I appreciate what you've done; but when you say the job's near done, I think you're lyin'.'

"'You think I'm lyin',' gasps Holywig, amazement smeared all over his face. 'Holy smoke! I s'posed you knew I was. We all get the habit, Bill. We got to convince ourselves or we can't bunk anybody else. Any dub can fool some people, but to get the real art into it,—why, do you know, when I'm givin' the boys a line of chatter, I get so interested in my own chin music that I really believe what I'm talking about. I'm a natural spell-binder, Bill; and now, with the strong-arm biz on the side, she's goin' through.'

"The job did boom for a while and then fell off worse than ever. Half the men wouldn't work and the rest were too hungry to do anything. If they did get a quorum, the stock didn't come; and when it did come, there was nobody there to put it in.

"Old Sam had had his hat fixed. He must have got out an injunction, or somebody clapped a lien on the place, because it was so solemn and quiet that you felt like taking your hat off when you peeked in. I sized it up one day. Outside you would think it was finished, but inside it was nothing but a shell with the iron work all rusty; and the only ones in the building that were doing a tap of work were a couple of robins hatching eggs in the attic.

"Every cent that Bill and Holywig could beg, borrow or steal was put into that job. They stuck together and tried hard not to fight. With all their faults they were game; and it was rather nice to see them, a couple of old bums, going down hill together.

"Bill hung on to the shop because the owners were hard headed business men who always bit at a dream if it was big enough. Holywig had to give up his imported booze and fall back on the cheap stuff, the old barroom tangle-foot. A glass of beer won't hurt anybody, but spir-

it rapping will put a man to the bad. He never got quite soused, but he looked on the redeye when it was red all right. It made him ratty at times and dopey, and that sort of thing is aggravating when you are talking business with a man.

"'Ain't there somebody else's leg we can pull?' says Bill one day, when they were sitting in back of a barroom, where they were allowed to linger because Bill had found a quarter on the sidewalk.

"'I don't know any new ones,' says Holywig. 'And the old ones is stretched as far as they'll go. Say, Bill, why don't you tap the family? You've got two boys workin' and the girl's got a good job. She's saved up near a hundred, ain't she? And there's the pianner. Can't you toss her a line of bunk and get her to swap it for a ukulele? You can buy 'em for seventy-five cents, and you'd be so much coin to the good.'

"'Holywig,' says Bill, getting up and shaking a quivering forefinger at him, 'I've touched 'em all I'm goin' to. I've buncoed 'em, I'll admit that; but they're my own flesh and blood and there's a limit,—a line drawn, and I've reached the line.'

"'What line?' says Holywig, with a sour grin. 'The bread line?'

"Bill was a bit of a sport in his way. 'Beth,' he says, sitting down, 'you came near sayin' a mouthful that time. To tell you the honest truth, there ain't a soul in the shack that's got a shoestring left to their name, if that's any consolation to you.'

"'I might have knowed it,' says Holywig, as though he were enjoying his own misery. 'I suppose you've simply rifled the ranch, from the bureau to the baby's bank—'

"'Holy smoke!' yells Bill, jumping up. 'I never thought of that! Say, Beth, I'm goin' home to lunch to-day, if they'll let me in. Have you got the time with you?'

"'No I ain't,' says Holywig. 'Cohen's got it, and what's more I sold the ticket.'

"Bill thinks for a minute. 'Say,' he says, 'ain't there a hammer or somethin' around the place? Ain't you got anything in your pocket, Beth.'

"'All I got in my clothes is a gun,' says Holywig. 'And if them boys that tackled Old Sam gets loose, I'll need it, believe me. They think I put up a job on 'em.'

"'Well, you won't need it for an hour or so,' says Bill. 'Let me have it to open the bank with. It's a china pig with a hole in its back, and I want somethin' to hit it with. Hurry up,' he says, 'there's four dollars in that pot if there's a cent, and I want to get away with it before the kindergarten lets out.'

"Holywig hands it over, and Bill scoots around the corner. After a while he comes back looking white.

"'Beth,' he says, holding out some change, 'I know you won't believe me, but I'm splittin' fair.'

"'Seventy cents,' howls Holywig. 'What'll I do for the room rent? I'm two weeks shy now, and the landlady's a Russian suffragette.'

"'Cut it out,' growls Bill. 'There was only a dollar sixty in it, and I did the work. Somebody's been shakin' it out of the slit. A fine loyal family I've got, a bunch of money grabbers, that's what they are. I'm on the level with you, Beth. We've both got to be on the level. We're adrift in the same boat and drinkin' out of the same bottle. We got to trust each other because nobody else will.'

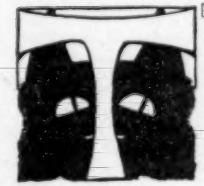
"'You got it pretty near right,' says Holywig. But I don't see no drift about the boat. We're hard among the breakers and we're broke. And maybe we'll have to go overboard and crawl-stroke it for the woods before long. I'm tellin' you straight, Bill. We better git while the gettin' is good. The boys is collectin' bricks, and it don't take no sleuth to tell what they're goin' to do with them. Shakespeare says all the world's a movie; but I ain't hankerin' after the star part in A Leap for Life, and you don't want to play leadin' man in A Crook's Funeral, do you?'

"Bill sighs. 'If I ever get out of this hole, I'll never take another job unless they buys the stock theirselves and come across with the coin every Saturday night. No more pay-when-it's-done jobs for me, Beth. Never again!'"

# THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE HILLS

BY CHART PITT

*After putting off a trip to town for forty years, a mountaineer braves the bright lights for one night. Then some important business takes him back to the mountains in a hurry.*



THE sun was peeping over the far, blue line of the Bitter-root Mountains, and the Salmon River canyon was filled with gorgeous shadows, as Tom Lawley came riding down the hill-trail that led to the ferry—and the town.

For forty years Tom Lawley had watched the sun rise above Bitter-roots, and dreamed of the land that lay beyond the yawning canyon.

In the days when he was young, his dreams had clustered about the pretty face of Mona Winters. But the girl had turned away from the long-legged mountain boy and married Jim Garret, the frailest youth on the mountain, but a lad who was ready of speech and brimful of laughter and song.

Jim Garret always had a smile for the gloomy bachelor,—but fate always threw him in the latter's path. For years Tom Lawley had searched among the rocks for a graphite mine. Particles of the black ore were scattered along the banks of Wolf Creek, and Tom had never given up the hunt. When at last he came upon the outcrop, Jim Garret was crouching above it.

So Tom Lawley had lived his solitary life, with a woman's face always dancing in the flames that crackled in his fireplace, and hate growing deeper and deadlier in his heart.

But after forty years of waiting and twenty years of remorseless hate, the old man was going to town.

His little rival was over in town now, making a deal with some mine promoters. Jim would soon be a rich man, and he would leave the mountain—he and the woman whose face had haunted Tom Lawley's flame for twenty years.

The thought filled the old man with dumb alarm. Somehow he couldn't picture life without Jim Garret. His hatred for the quick-spoken little man had become a part of his very life, like the winds that whispered among the mountain pines, and the morbid plaint of the cliff owls that mourned among the rim rocks.

He realized that never again would he sit beside his cabin and look across the great open spaces of the canyon—and dream of the town beyond. That land of beyond would no longer be a fairy world, when his little rival had become a part of it. And the woman—would her face still flutter in the flames, where he sat smoking away the hours of the lonely winter nights?

Beneath him, Tom Lawley could see the white thread of the trail that wound away to the river and the land beyond. In his childish delight he leaned over the saddle and whispered soft words to the horse.

The horse like himself was a native of the mountains, and his heels had flung the dust into the eyes of the fastest steed in the hills.

Tom Lawley had spent too much time dreaming and hating to clear a farm among the pines. His truck patch furnished him with what he required for his own needs, but winter always found him without hay for his horse. So Billie was turned loose to gather his living on the open breaks of the canyon, below the snow line. And always he returned to his place at the head of the "outlaw herd," the toughest bunch of wild horses on the winter range. But when the wild-flowers came back to the hillsides, Billie always

returned to Tom, and the luscious grass that grew beneath the mountain pines. The black outlaw was the one tender spot in the loveless life of the old mountaineer.

As the miles of the winding trail slipped by, the heart of the mountaineer forged ahead into that magical country to which he and the outlaw horse were journeying. Through numberless summer nights he had sat alone in the purple dusk, looking away across the miles of dry canyon air, watching the soft flicker of the arc lights in the town. Now he wondered if the land beyond would be as beautiful as he had pictured it.

Once his eyes turned toward the stubborn hillsides where Wolf Creek came snarling down to join the Salmon. It was up there among the jumble of rocks that he had found Jim Garret bending above the outcrop. The sight of those naked hillsides filled him with a burning wrath.

The outlaw horse and the gloomy rider swung down to the lower reaches of the canyon, where the cactus-flowers were already blazing upon the sunburned hillsides, and the lazy rattlesnakes beat their ghastly tattoo at the sides of the dusty trail.

Tom Lawley ate his dinner at the road-house beside the flooded Salmon. Then began the slow, hard climb up the eastern wall of the canyon, to the land of farms and wagon-roads and the arc lights of the town. As the canyon trail grew steep, he slipped from the saddle and stubbornly clawed his way up the rock wall. Again and again the weary climber turned his eyes to the terraced rim rocks above him, where the cool hill-winds were blowing. When at last he stumbled up the switch-back trail that had been worn into the steep face of the rock, and stood upon the top of the terraced cliffs, he filled his tortured lungs with a breath of the pure hill-winds and sank exhausted on the flower-strewn sod.

When he had recovered from his grilling climb, the mountaineer staggered to his feet. Billie was cropping the lush grass at the side of the trail. He came at his master's call.

For one moment Tom Lawley stood with his hand upon the saddle, and looked back into the yawning canyon out of which he had crawled with such agonizing toil.

Like a white thread the pony-trail wound down among the sun-baked buttes, till it was swallowed up by the miles. In the bottom of that gorgeous-tinted pit, the Salmon River trailed its way among the dry hills, like a silver thread running aimlessly through the garish pattern of a carpet. Beyond the river the jumbled hogback ridges that made up the far side of the canyon were blended into a dreamy picture. The hot miles had softened their flinty outlines, and only the glamoury and romantic remained. Above the hills a far line of pines cut into the gaudy blue of the mountain sky. There was home—the land of hate and longing, and beautiful dreams that never came true. There was not a trace of emotion in the mournful, gray eyes of the mountaineer, as he stood upon the rim of the great canyon, and looked down into the yawning gulf, where mountain ranges were shrunken to ant-hills under the blight of the miles.

The fact that people had journeyed many thousand miles to look upon this wonder-work of nature, meant nothing to Tom Lawley. To him it was only a matter of so many hours hard climbing—something that had shut him away from the land of promise for forty years.

He sprang into the saddle, and followed the flat, dusty road toward the town. Once he turned for a backward glance at the land he had left behind. He passed a rough hand across his smarting eyes as he turned away. He leaned wearily against the pommel of his saddle, and his mouth drooped despondently under his tawny moustache.

This was the hour for dreams. For forty years he had seen visions in the twilight. Now the dreams would not come.

Night swept in across the flat grain-fields. The arc lights blazed out from the town ahead. The soft prairie muck muffled the sound of the horse's feet. Silently the strange pair from the hills drifted through the darkness and down to the stone-paved streets.

Slowly down the street the mountaineer guided his outlaw steed. With wide, won-

dering eyes he stared into the lighted shop-windows. Tom Lawley had seen some wonderful visions in the twilight hour, but never had dreamed there was so much clothing in the whole world as was here so lavishly displayed.

An automobile came rushing up the street, and the outlaw horse bolted for cover. Then Tom Lawley hunted up a livery stable, and continued his sight-seeing on foot.

Later in the evening, as he was passing a restaurant, the odor of food reminded him that he had eaten nothing since noon. He entered the building and gingerly took his place upon one of the revolving stools that lined the long counter.

The man from the hills had no knowledge of what the menu was intended for. So he made his selections from the things he saw upon the plates of his fellow diners. He tasted many things that were new to his palate. Some proved to his liking, the others he sampled and shoved aside. There was no disrespect in his manner till he sampled the glass of river water that was placed beside his plate.

Tom Lawley knew good water. He shoved the glass away in disgust. Somehow the meal didn't seem finished, without a drink of cold spring water, such as bubbled up beneath the mountain pines.

That glass of warm river water was the entering wedge of dissatisfaction. After that the dreamy, gray eyes of the mountaineer peered through the haze of romance and glamour that had been born of the glittering arc lights and saw many things that did not measure up to the visions he had seen, when the dream-hour came creeping up to the little cabin in the hills.

He resented the foolish haste of the people who swarmed across the stone-paved streets, like ants upon a ruined ant-hill.

Empty-handed they rushed up the street—and empty-handed they scurried back. There was no apparent object in their movements, still they crowded and jostled one another, and no one paused to shake the hand of a friend. In the code of the hills, this haste was a foolish waste of energy—and passing a friend without a hand-shake was almost as bad as horse-stealing.

Then out of that jumble of strange faces, Tom Lawley caught a glimpse of a familar figure. Jim Garret was hurrying down the street, with a stranger upon either side. For a moment the old hate flamed into the gray eyes of the mountaineer. Then a slow smile of pitying contempt settled upon his lips.

If Jim Garret was going to leave the mountains and come to the town to live, he would spend the rest of his days scurrying along the street, going in search of nothing like the rest of the people of that mad land. That thought was the first bit of satisfaction Tom Lawley had felt since the shadow of the little man darkened his life.

The mountaineer mixed with the crowd trying to discover what it was that urged them along at that reckless pace An hour later he gave up in disgust. His long legs were trembling with fatigue, yet he had not discovered the errand upon which one solitary man was hurrying.

He found a rooming-house, and stumbled off to bed. The remainder of the night was undisturbed by even a dream. The hot rays of the morning sun streamed through the window and fell upon the leathery cheek of the sleeper. The mountaineer stretched his gaunt arms, and shook the stupor from him. Then he went down to the street.

In the daylight Tom Lawley discovered even more about the town that was not to his liking. The mad haste had seemed foolish the night before, now it seemed positively wicked. He slipped into the smoky shelter of a chophouse, glad to escape from the pushing, stamping throng.

For a moment he forgot his displeasure as he bent over a juicy steak. But the glass of warm river water was there to annoy.

He lingered over his breakfast in the cool restaurant. But at last it was finished, and he shuffled out into the glaring sunshine again.

The old mountaineer tried to forget about the people who stamped across the stone-paved street. He turned his eyes toward the line of pines that fringed the far rim

of the canyon. But the shuffle of moving feet hung like a curse in the air. There was no place where he could rest. Somebody jostled him every time he paused to look into a shop window.

With a thoughtful, serious face, Tom Lawley turned his steps toward the livery stable where he had left the black outlaw. In front of the stable he bumped into his little rival from the hills. Jim Garret was nervously pacing up and down the street. The liveryman was watching him from the door.

For the first time in twenty years, Tom Lawley paused to take a good look at the man who had robbed him of his sweetheart. There were lines of care about the frank eyes of the bantum mountaineer. His mouth did not fall into the easy smile as it used to.

Tom thrust out his hand awkwardly.

"Sold your mine yet?" he ventured.

"Yes, I guess I'll be leaving the hills," Jim admitted. "Fellows by the name of Price and Armstrong are going to give me ten thousand for it. We were over at the Recorder's Office, looking things up, when they saw a fellow on the street, and went out to talk to him. They told me to wait. You haven't seen anything of them, have you?" he turned to the man in the stable door.

"So you are the fellow who was trying to sell a mine to Armstrong, are you?" There was sympathy in the eyes of the man who kept the stable.

Jim nodded his head.

"Sorry, partner," the liveryman stammered as he looked across the flat grainfields toward the Salmon River canyon. "I guess they have done you. They were in here a half hour ago, and I heard them talking, as how some fellow hadn't recorded his claim, and the time for recording had expired. They have gone to relocate your mine. They hired the two fastest horses in town."

Jim Garret turned hopeless eyes toward the west. Far away upon the edge of the breaks, two dim specks moved swiftly down to the rim of the canyon.

"I've got to beat them to it," Jim groaned as he started toward his pony.

"No use," the liveryman interrupted. "They have got a good lead on you—and I told you they hired the fastest horses in town. I'm sorry."

"What do you know about fast horses?" There was something like a sneer on Tom Lawley's lips as he handed a coin to the barnman, and threw the saddle on the black outlaw.

"Guess I'll do some *re-locating* myself," he shot the words back at them as the range-leader cleared the sidewalk at a bound, and thundered up the street.

Tom Lawley bent low over the saddle, urging the horse forward with soft, purring whispers. It was the outlaw soul of the mountaineer that was speaking to the inky range-devil. There was an urge in his drawling voice, that found a ready sympathy in the ruthless heart of the beast.

The horse ran as he never had run before. Stinging quirt or biting rowels could not have sent him reeling across the miles at that killing pace.

The clattering pavements gave place to the velvet muck of the prairie. There was no sound except the measured drumming of the outlaw's hoofs, like the beating of an evil heart. Farms and cross roads were blended in a blur as they passed. Tom Lawley measured their speed by the feel of the wind that swept into his face.

There was a smile of deep content upon his lips. He was going back to the hills, where there was time for dreaming—and time for hate.

The flat miles slipped away beneath them, and the gorgeous expanse of the canyon showed over its ragged rim. Far away upon the trail ahead, two specks crawled down toward the river.

Tom Lawley filled his lungs with a breath of cool hill-winds, before he took the plunge into the scorching inferno where cactus and rattlesnakes flourished.

They were going slower now. The black outlaw had run too many canyon trails to take a chance on the dizzy switch backs that zigzagged down the steep face of the crags. The mountaineer did not urge him.

They had lessened the distance between

them and the fugitive horsemen while crossing the flat country. Now they must be content with holding their own, till they reached the easier grades that bordered the river. And beyond the river, where the trail swung up the canyon wall to Wolf Creek—that would be the place where the outlaw horse must prove the iron of his stubborn soul.

Tom Lawley lifted a hand to shade his eyes from the dancing sun-glow that lashed the hot miles of the canyon. Closely he watched the riders ahead. They were nearing the rolling hills that made up the floor of the great canyon. Soon they would be able to gallop their horses again, if they thought there was need of it.

The moving specks ahead crawled slowly across the last switch back—then swept over the rolling bunch-grass hills at the bottom of the pit in a reckless gallop. They had seen the solitary rider that was relentlessly following upon their trail.

In an agony of impatience, Tom Lawley watched them from the crags above. Like the wind they were sweeping across the floor of the canyon, while he crawled like a fly upon the rocky wall. Yet he dared not urge the horse by even a word.

The fugitives were already hidden among the rolling hills beyond the river, when he swung down from the last switch back. The mountaineer crouched low over his saddle and whispered to the horse that he trusted with such stubborn faith.

"Now is your chance, Billie boy," he urged. "Now is the time to show them fellows whether they have got the two best horses in town. It's up to you, Billie. I'm trusting you, boy—and I know you won't throw me down."

As the giant black leaped forward, Tom Lawley touched the bridle lightly, and the horse turned away from the beaten ferry trail, into the cactus and shell-rock that led down to the old, abandoned ford, where the Salmon River whirled across a sand-bar.

The outlaw horse was white with lather, when at last he reeled down from the hill, and plunged into the icy water of the Salmon. For a way he struggled against the swift current, then he lost his footing in the deeper water and was whirled down stream. Wise with years of experience in flooded rivers, the horse turned his head up-stream and fought his way across to the far bank.

Once more Tom Lawley urged the animal over the rolling hills. He knew he had taken a desperate chance in sending the lathery horse into the icy water, and his only hope lay in keeping him at a swift gait.

The rolling hills slipped away beneath the drumming hoofs of the outlaw, and the canyon wall rose up before them. Still the mountaineer clung to his saddle. Billie never before had been asked to carry a rider up the dizzy wall of the canyon. He turned his head questioningly as he reared to make the climb.

Tom Lawley's mournful gray eyes were filled with shame and despair. His very soul protested against riding the matchless animal up the switch backs. But that tremendous trail was his last hope of success. The melancholy dreamer had reached the crossroads of life. For forty years he had seen a vision in the twilight; and when at last he had stood beneath the sputtering arc lights he had fretted over the heartless haste of the town, and his heart had gone back to his native pines, where there was time for love—and time for hate.

Wolf Creek Mine also had figured in his dreams. Now that stretch of rich hillside was his for the taking. It was almost within his grasp, but it all depended upon the black outlaw who ruled the winter range.

Tom Lawley felt the heave of the animal's overstrained body beneath him as the horse sprang into the trail that zigzagged up the canyon wall. He measured the face of the wall with his eyes and trembled at the knowledge that never before had a horse carried a rider up that terrible trail at anything more than a snail's pace. But the black was leaping across the zigzags with a speed that almost threw the mountaineer from the saddle, whenever the animal made the sharp turns.

The sun shone down through the dry

air, and the rock wall flung its deadly heat into the faces of the desperate travelers that surged up the tortuous trail.

The man listened to the shower of shell-rocks that thundered down the hill behind them, and hoped against reason that the animal's strength would not fail him before they reached the mine.

A sob that was almost a prayer fluttered from the lips of the mountaineer when the shivering horse stumbled across the last switch back, and the easier grades of Wolf Creek canyon lay before them.

Then for the first time Tom Lawley turned his sharp eyes toward the other trail that followed easier grades up from the ferry. Among the rolling, bunch-grass hills he saw the other horsemen, urging their animals to their utmost. It would be a very close finish, even if the reeling outlaw kept his feet to the end of the race.

Tom Lawley bent over the animal's neck and whispered imploringly to the sobbing animal that was forcing himself in a last desperate effort.

At the foot of the terraced buttes that held the graphite outcrop, the black outlaw stumbled and fell. The rider went sprawling over its head.

A shout of triumph went up from the men who came thundering up the other trail.

Tom Lawley shook the dust out of his eyes and stumbled to his feet. He limped as he rushed for the cliffs and began scrambling like a goat among the rocks.

He heard the thud of galloping feet, but he did not look back. The cliff owls fluttered screeching from their nests among the crags, as the long-legged mountaineer fought his way to the top. A moment later he stepped back to the edge of the cliff, and waved a bit of paper at the men from town.

"The Wolf Creek Mine is re-located. No trespassing," he called down in a voice that quivered with passion.

The mine promoters turned their horses toward the ferry, and rode grumblingly away.

In the purple canyon twilight, little Jim Garret rode up to his lost mine. The mountaineer was still on guard, crouched among the scab rock, digging Indian kawse for his supper. His mournful eyes peered out of his hungry, pinched face as his rival rode up; then he resumed his digging.

"I'm glad you beat them to it, Tom," the little man stammered awkwardly. "You are an honest man at least. I don't suppose you want to sell out?"

"Go talk to the owner," the mountaineer gulped as he nodded toward the discovery notice upon the stake beside them.

In the fading twilight, Jim Garret could just make out the name on the location notice. It was *Mona Garret.*

"I owe you a debt I'll try to pay—some day, if the chance comes." The voice of the little man faltered and broke as he reached out a hand to his neighbor.

There was a strange light in the eyes of Tom Lawley as he looked away to where the black horse lay hunched up beside the trail.

"You don't owe me nothing. It's him down there you owe it to—the horse that everybody on the mountain has cursed. He run himself to death because I asked him to—and we've got to take him up the hill. I want to bury him back of the cabin—for the nights are going to be awful lonely now."

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FOR February: THE HANGING BASKET *by Henry D. Muir,* being an account of the domestic trials of a basket maker and of his successful attempt to simplify matters.

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# THE ELOPEMENT OF KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR

BY ERIC COLLIN

*Old King Nebuchadnezzar was a good old scout, but, like a lot of other kings, he drank too much amateur beer and smoked too many cigarettes and tried to do his own thinking instead of leaving it to a competent prime minister.*

EBUCHADNEZZAR, King of Babylon, lolled against one of the imitation marble pillars of his magnificent palace, a look of utter boredom on his vain and handsome face. Stacked around him in artistic confusion were the rich spoils of his recent conquest of Jerusalem,—"the pots, and the shovels, and the snuffers, and the spoons, and all the vessels of brass wherewith they ministered." Ever and anon he would shake back petulantly the shining black curls from his forehead,—curls which accentuated his effeminacy despite his noble height and the broadness of his shoulders. He sighed wearily as he pulled back his heavy gauntlet and glanced at a small diamond-incrusted watch which bedecked his delicate white wrist. Beyond the portals of the city he descried the arrival of a jitney-bus, and, descending therefrom, the portly figure of Jonah, a long, black stogie protruding cockily from his mouth at an angle of forty-five degrees.

The sight, however, gave him an inspiration. Loosening his heavy steel breastplate, he produced from the folds of an inner garment a monogrammed, gold cigarette case; and soon, rings of soft, gray smoke were floating lazily upwards.

"The curse of Jereboam on the man who invented biblical plays!" he exploded violently, after several minutes of deep meditation.

His gaze wandered across the stage to where Salome, clad in diaphanous draperies, was pirouetting gracefully before King Herod. The king, fat and bloated, leaned forward on his throne, leering covetously at the sinuous figure floating suggestively before him.

The camera man turned the crank with measured precision, while the director leaned back easily in a chair, seeming to evince little interest in the performance being enacted before him.

The sun beat down on the stage pitilessly white, in true Californian style. The heat, inside the studio, was terrific, intensified by the high walls which shut out each vagrant breeze, and intensified threefold by the white canvas shades which tossed the blazing rays back and forth like glass reflectors. No sound broke the stillness save the metallic click of the camera and the silken swish of Salome's draperies.

The dancer whirled up to the dais on which the king sat and, dropping to her knees, raised the hem of his purple robe to her carmine lips and kissed it thrice. The king smiled fatuously, and his attendants clapped their hands. Salome, a smile on her winsome face, bowed her way gracefully off stage. The crank ceased turning, and the director rose leisurely to his feet.

King Nebuchadnezzar's lips parted in a saccharine smile.

"Ye gods!" he gasped. "What a superb figure! And," he reflected, "with our combined salaries I'd make—well, I'd make almost as much as that lying press agent says I make. I'll ask her again. She's got too much sense to turn me down."

He walked bravely over to where Salome, a gaudily colored dressing gown thrown negligently over her shoulders, was standing with the director and the camera man earnestly discussing one of the finer points of her art. Watching his opportunity, he drew her confidentially aside, his heart thumping wildly as his eyes drank in the rounded contour of her shapely form,

"That's the ideal costume you've got there for this kind of weather, Maizie," he began lamely. Somehow or other the heat seemed to be affecting his determination.

The dancer carefully wiped the perspiration out of her eyes before she answered.

"Can all that bunk," she retorted. "I'm as wet as the Baron's booze-orium. You good-looking sissies lie around here all day and crab about the heat. Wait till you do some work and you'll find out."

This wasn't exactly what the leading man had expected from a mere dancer, even if she was almost as high-salaried a personage as himself. He thought he'd try again.

"You can't talk to me about work," he pouted petulantly. "Didn't I just storm Jerusalem at the head of a thousand evil-smelling hod-carriers rigged out as soldiers? Bah! It makes me sick to think of it. And because that fool of a camera man makes a bally mess of things the whole thing has to be done all over again. It's a dirty crime. That's what I call it."

"Oh well!" sighed Maizie. "That's what you get your fifty thousand a year for, I guess."

"Fifty thousand—hell!" spluttered the leading man. "That rotter of a press agent can think of more lies in a minute—"

Maizie laughed teasingly.

"Look out that he doesn't hear you, Ferdie," she warned, "or perhaps he won't give you any more of those lies,—and then where would you be?"

The leading man cursed the perversity of women in general, and dancers in particular, under his breath. He saw he would have to try different tactics.

"Say, Maizie," he began, "don't you think it's about time you gave me an answer to that question?"

"What question, Ferdie?"

"Don't pull that innocent stuff on me, Maizie. Really you know, it doesn't suit your particular style of beauty. You understand well enough what I mean."

"Honest I don't, Ferdie."

"Well then—I'll ask you again. Will you marry me, Maizie?"

"Oh, that! Sure—if you want me to."

"Quit fooling, Maizie," the leading man peevishly remonstrated. "Can't you ever take anything seriously?"

"Didn't you ask me if I'd marry you, Mr. Hobart? Excuse me. My mistake."

"Then you meant it, Maizie?" The leading man was getting excited. "You really meant it?"

"Sure I meant it. What's getting into you anyhow, Ferd? Can't you see I'm just crazy about you?"

The dancer's voice had a strangely sarcastic ring, but the enraptured lover was much too agitated to notice it.

"Fine and dandy, Maizie!" he exclaimed. "When shall we tie the knot? The sooner the better, I say."

"To-night—or to-morrow—or whenever you please," she answered, and then gazed away evasively.

The leading man was frankly surprised. While not expecting that the dancer would refuse him—HIM—Ferdinand Hobart, star extraordinary of the Wonder Film Corporation, and the idol of millions, he nevertheless had hardly figured on such a sudden and dramatic capitulation. It only went to prove that his remarkable personality was all that the press agent said it was,—and for the first time his heart warmed towards this much-maligned individual.

Fancy! Little Maizie Pendleton, premier danseuse,—she of the "100 per cent form divine," as the press agent dubbed her,—darling Maizie, literally throwing herself at his head. It was the more remarkable as he was still conscious of the many snubs he had received from that same quarter in the not far distant past. Ferdinand Hobart, star extraordinary, felt justified in throwing out his chest a bit.

Maizie was gazing dubiously into space and wondering, wondering fearfully, if her rash venture was going to bring her success and happiness.

"Sometimes," she thought, "it takes a sudden shock to make a man wake up. Now if Freddie really cared—"

She was startled out of her reverie by something the tall figure, arrayed in the steel armor and the incongruous wrist-watch was saying to her. He repeated it

twice before she comprehended the full meaning.

"How about this evening?" she repeated vaguely. "Oh, yes. This evening. Sure. It suits me all right."

"We'll make a pretty good living between us. A couple of thousand a month won't look so bad, will it?" The leading man was warming to his subject.

"Is that all you're thinking of?" Maizie replied, her black eyes snapping dangerously.

"No-o," said Ferdie, nonplussed by the sudden change. "But—"

"Forget it," said Maizie, shortly.

The leading man saw that he was getting off the track again. Women were such damned incomprehensible beings. He would try the ever-soothing influence of publicity.

"Think what a peach of a press-story it will make, Maizie. 'KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR ELOPES WITH SALOME.' Isn't that a hum-dinger? That'll make 'em cry like a child." He laughed his cultivated, well-modulated laugh that had rarely failed of success when tried before a matinee audience.

But Maizie didn't appear to be at all impressed with the laugh nor interested in the press-story. She was gazing wistfully across the long stage to where a man in a long, white robe had just succeeded in hanging himself, without appearing to be any the worse for the deed.

"Oh you Judas Iscariot!" she hailed. "Come 'n over here a minute."

Judas untangled the rope from about his neck and strolled over.

"Hi, kit!" he greeted familiarly. "How's Salome the day?"

"Sho shad," sighed the dancer. "I'm going to get married."

Judas, one side of his face daubed a sickly green and the other a dirty yellow, blanched perceptibly under the grease. Salome was watching his features narrowly. He attempted a smile,—and succeeded weakly.

"'Wot the 'ell, Bill, wot the 'ell!'" he quoted feebly. "'Who's the blooming bridegroom?'"

"Now who would you think?" interposed the leading man, swelling egotistically, pressing the tips of his fingers together, and rising on his toes in typical histrionic fashion.

"Well I'll be interned!" gasped Judas. "You?"

"Sure thing," smiled the leading man. "Who else?"

"Holy Jehoshaphat!" gasped Judas again. "When?"

"This very evening, Freddie. Some speed to this little couple, believe me. And just think of the headlines in all the papers! 'KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR ELOPES WITH SALOME.' Isn't that some press-story, eh? I guess they'll all fall for that all right, all right."

"Yes-es. Some press-story." Freddie struggled vainly to collect his thoughts. Somehow or other his knees felt all wobbly. He shaded his eyes from the sun.

"Congratulations, old man," he finally blurted, and thrust out a strong, hairy hand. Then he looked down at the dancer.

"You too, Maizie," he said.

"Thank you, Freddie," she replied.

"Don't mention it," said Freddie sarcastically.

Maizie winced.

"Can you dig up a sky-pilot, Freddie?" the leading man interposed importantly. "I'll be out on location this afternoon and I won't have time to attend to those little details. And 'phone the Baron, too. Get a table for four, Freddie. You can pick up another girl, and the treat's on me. The sky's the limit on such a festive occasion. The sky's the limit."

"I'll see what I can do," Freddie replied hoarsely. And then added under his breath, "I don't think." He walked slowly back across the stage without a glance in the dancer's direction.

"Fred's a pretty good old scout," said Ferdie generously. "Say, Maizie—"

"I think I'll change," interrupted Maizie. "S'long, Ferdie."

"See you later, dearie," said the leading man happily. And he watched ecstatically as she tripped lightly across the stage in the direction of the dressing rooms.

"Maizie, back in her room, sank into a

chair and, burying her face in her hands, burst into a flood of tears.

"He doesn't care," she sobbed. "He doesn't care. If he did—" she trailed off into a cadence of hysterical sobs.

Fifteen minutes later a rap came at the dressing-room door. Maizie did not answer. The door opened softly and a greasy head peered in.

"Are you dressing, Maizie?"

The dancer rose from her chair, the silken dressing gown falling unheeded from her shoulders. A sarcastic answer was framed on her lips, but the look of pain in Freddie's kindly eyes checked her.

Freddie closed the door carefully behind him.

"Why don't you put some clothes on, Maizie?" he began gently. "Standing there—like that—before God and everybody—"

The dancer sank again into her chair, her body shaking convulsively.

"Well, well, Maizie! What's the kid crying about?"

Maizie looked up, a pitiful object, the tears streaming in furrowed rivulets through the grease paint.

"I wouldn't cry on my wedding day," Freddie continued soothingly.

Maizie swallowed a big gulp and said nothing.

"I only remember having cried twice in my life," said Freddie reminiscently. "Once was when my mother bought me a wide straw hat with two blue ribbons hanging over the side—and insisted that I wear it, and—" he smiled as Maizie's lips parted, showing two rows of pearly teeth, "the other time was when I was growing so fast that my trousers hung midway between my knees and my pedal extremities, and the other boys used to kid me, and yell jeeringly, 'Give your shoes a surprise party, Freddie, and invite your pants down!' "

A rippling laugh escaped from between the dancer's painted lips, and the shadows fled scurrying from her eyes so that they sparkled like the sun dancing on the waves beyond the studio walls.

"I think you're cruel, Freddie—" she lingered lovingly over the name—"cruel, cruel, when you see I'm so miserable, to make fun of me."

"Going to get married in a few hours,—and miserable!" ejaculated Freddie. "What d'you allow for that?"

"Don't, Freddie. Please don't."

"Don't? Don't what? It's the truth, isn't it? Darned if I don't believe you're sorry."

Maizie gulped down another sob.

"I 'phoned to the sky-pilot to be ready at seven o'clock," the villain glibly lied. "Is that satisfactory to the aforementioned contracting parties?"

Maizie sobbed for an answer.

"Ferdie wants me to run you into town, Maizie, as he has to go out on location this afternoon—"

"He can go to hell for all I care," Maizie interrupted viciously.

"Now, Maizie, you know that's not the way to talk about your prospective husband. Let's you and me try to get along."

"Let's not—and say we did," snapped Maizie.

Freddie grinned amiably.

"Would you for a big, red apple?" he asked teasingly.

"No-o—" The dancer hesitated with an alluring smile on her pursed lips. "But I would for a bunch of violets."

"Well then, be ready at five o'clock, kit." He put his hand on the door.

"Freddie?"

"Yes, kit?"

"You're not going, are you?"

Freddie turned sharply. "Look here, Maizie. What are you marrying this big stiff for?"

Maizie feigned astonishment. "Big stiff?" she iterated.

"Yes. Big stiff. I said it."

"That's not a very nice way to talk about my prospective husband," mimicked the dancer.

"You know I love you, Maizie."

"Then why don't you ask me to marry you?"

"I would if I could, Maizie."

"Would if you could!" repeated Maizie scornfully. "What's the matter with you? Are you crippled?"

"Not exactly."

"I know what it is,—you think I'm not good enough to marry you. I'm all right to play with,—yes. But when it comes to marriage,—no. But I'll show you that I'm good enough to marry the leading man—even if I'm not good enough for a Judas." Maizie panted angrily.

"No. It's not that, Maizie. I told you before that I would if I could. I'm the one that's not good enough."

"I should be the best judge of that," said Maizie, weakening.

Freddie reached for the door again.

"Well, so long, Maizie," he said.

"If it's the money, Freddie—"

"No. It's not the money."

"Oh, all right. Just as you say."

"I'll call for you at five o'clock, kit."

Maizie did not answer. She listened with dull ears to the closing of the door. Then she straightened in her chair and savagely wiped away the tears that persisted in welling in her eyes. She would show Freddie Hampton where to get off. If he thought he was too good to marry her she would show him—and show him a-plenty.

So she wiped the paint from her face and body and twisted her long black hair into an adorable knot,—just the way that Freddie always liked it. Then she penciled her eyebrows, rubbed a little rouge on her pale cheeks, and painted her lips until they looked like red, red cherries.

She was adjusting a little black and white checked chapeau, with a high pompon of forbidden aigrettes jauntily waving in front, when Freddie burst excitedly into the room.

In one admiring glance he took in the stylish red velveteen gown, daringly high at the bottom and audaciously low at the top, and he mentally decided that Maizie Pendleton was "all class," and much to be desired.

"I see you're all ready," he panted. "That's fine."

"It's hardly five o'clock yet, is it?" the dancer inquired coldly.

"No. Not yet. But what's the diff? Let's get to town and get this thing over with."

"Why all the hurry?"

"Well! Aren't you just dying to get spliced? I know I would be—under similar circumstances."

"Isn't Ferdie out on location?"

"Sure. He asked me to run you into town, and he'll meet us later at the city hall. You know he's got a hunch I'm his valet. As soon as he can get away he'll follow. Meanwhile, we'll get things fixed with old man Cupid while we're waiting."

Maizie looked at him suspiciously.

"You're mighty anxious," she said.

"Not at all," Freddie replied evasively. "It's the least a fellow could do for his pal."

"Is the 'big stiff' a pal of yours?" Maizie asked.

"Ab-so-lute-ly," said Freddie, ignoring the sarcasm. "Say the word and let's go."

"I'm ready," said the dancer.

"The car waits without, milady," said Freddie, bowing like a butler.

He opened the door and they went out into the glaring sunlight. A rangy, white racing car was drawn up at the curb, and Freddie patted it affectionately as he helped the dancer arrange her skirts in the bottom of the tonneau.

"Ferdie's got a peach of a car," said the dancer, cattily conveying the impression that the car in which she was seated was a long way from being "a peach." She glanced admiringly at a large blue machine standing in the shade of a pepper tree.

"That reminds me," Freddie said, half to himself. And he walked over to the "peach," lifted the hood, and opened a small valve. Then he loosened a screw until it was almost ready to drop off, and closed the hood again.

"They knew what they were doing when they picked me for the part of Judas Iscariot," he said enigmatically, as he climbed into his seat.

"What d'you mean?" asked the dancer.

Freddie did not answer. He jammed his heel on the starter.

"What do you think about the divorce question?" he said abruptly, as the car slid out into the white boulevard. Had he not been so busy he would have noticed the dancer start perceptibly.

"What d'you mean?" she asked again.

"Well, for instance, have you any religi-

cus scruples about divorce?" he queried.

"Me and religion don't get along together," she replied, and twisted in her seat uncomfortably, as though the subject was extremely distasteful.

"You wouldn't hold divorce against a person, would you?" he persisted.

"I guess not. That is, not if I—I liked him—er—them."

"That's all I wanted to know," he said.

The car sped along the smooth, white boulevard, which stretched in a straight line mile after mile till it was lost in the distance. For awhile neither of them spoke. The dancer watched the shadows of the eucalyptus trees as they flashed across the car like whirling dervishes. Suddenly she was flung heavily against her companion as they made a sharp turn round a corner leading at right angles to the main highway.

"Where are you going?" the dancer cried in dismay. "This isn't the road to Los Angeles, is it?"

"This is the road to Santa Ana, kit,—the Gretna Green of California."

"But I thought we were going to meet Ferdie in Los Angeles?"

"We are—later."

The dancer knew that something out of the ordinary was about to happen, but she could not determine just what it was. Furthermore, it did not greatly matter. For some reason Freddie did not want to marry her, but she was content to ride with him thus. She snuggled closer to him, and felt strangely happy. She was not given to abstract reasoning, for there was in her a great deal of the primitive. Yet she could not help wondering, in a vague way, what there was about this big clumsy man, with the ugly features and the kindly eyes that wrought such an attraction over her, while the handsome man who was soon to be her husband was so repellent. She had finally decided to ascribe it to the general contrariness of all women, when the car slowed down and came to a stop. A two-storied, white stone building glistened before them in the brilliant sunshine.

"Here's where we get out, ba-bee," Freddie was saying.

They entered a long, low room occupied only by a white-haired old man who was stooping over a ponderous volume. Maizie was still in a half trance and, due, she thought, to the swiftness of their ride, the room seemed to be going slowly round and round. She gripped Freddie's arm tightly to steady herself. As in a dream she heard the men talking.

"Hello, Benson," greeted Freddie.

"Hello, yourself," answered the other, coming forward.

"Meet Miss Pendleton," said Freddie.

"Glad to know you," said the white-haired man, smiling.

"What have you got in the way of licenses to-day?" enquired Freddie.

"We have some very fine bargains to-day," said the old man. "Marked down from $2 to $1.98 for this day only. What color does the young lady prefer?"

"Some color that will hold fast," replied Freddie, giving Maizie's arm a playful pinch.

The old man hauled the big book over to the counter, and Maizie saw that it was a license book.

"You can't get the license until Ferdie comes," she whispered.

"Sure you can," said Freddie. "Why not?"

"I thought he had to sign it?"

Maizie continued to talk in a whisper, and she wondered what had happened to her voice.

"That's a mere formality," Freddie replied, grinning at the white-haired man, who winked in response. "I'll fill it out for him."

He wrote for a few minutes.

"You fill it out here," he commanded.

The dancer did as she was bid.

"Now sign here," said the clerk.

Maizie signed.

"Thanks awfully, old man," said Freddie, depositing a gold piece on the counter. "Good-bye."

"Good luck to both of you," the clerk sang out cheerfully as they passed out between the folding doors.

"He's a nice old man, isn't he," said Maizie, blinking in the sunlight.

"Yep," said Freddie.

"You didn't get your change," reflected Maizie.

Freddie did not answer. He seemed preoccupied.

They climbed back into the car again, but it was only a few minutes before they were once more at a standstill. Maizie noticed that the street was completely arched over with trailing pepper trees through which the sun vainly struggled, making it appear like dusk. The whole affair was getting more and more inexplicable.

"What's the matter, Freddie?" she asked, trying ineffectually to adjust her reasoning faculties.

"Nothing's the matter," Freddie answered, apparently enjoying to the full his companion's confusion. "We've got to go in here for a few minutes."

A man in a shabby black suit answered the door. His face was fat, and round, and red, and his bald head was shaped like a hen's egg. Freddie conversed with him in low tones, and then handed him several bills.

Two other persons, a man and a woman, mysteriously appeared on the scene, and the man with the peculiar shaped head started talking. Finally it dawned on the dancer's consciousness that she was being married. It didn't seem to surprise her, and her whole body became suffused with a warm tingling. She was very happy. Then she felt Freddie's lips on hers, and she clung to him, fearful that it was all a dream.

They went out again into the dusk beneath the pepper trees, and the barren brown hills in the distance had never looked so beautiful, the dancer thought. The mountains behind Pasadena were tinged a golden red; and the emerald sea, moving restlessly below them, melted into the blue of the sky beyond the peaks of Catalina.

"What did you do?" Maizie inquired helplessly.

"I married you, of course, silly," said Freddie, laughing like a schoolboy.

"But I thought you didn't want to?" persisted the dancer.

"I said that I would if I could, but I couldn't—if you recollect," replied Freddie. "After I left you I went back to my dressing room, and I found a telegram awaiting me."

He produced from his pocket a slip of yellow paper and handed it to the girl. She read:

*"RENO NEVADA JUL 6 1916*
*FREDERICK HAMPTON*
*CARE WONDER FILM CORPORATION LONG BEACH CALIF*
*YOUR WIFE AWARDED A DECREE OF DIVORCE THIS AFTERNOON NO ALIMONY ASKED*
*BRAND & BRAND ATTORNEYS."*

"So that was the reason?" she said at last.

"That was the reason," Freddie replied. "Have you any objection to marrying a divorcee?"

"Not if I like him," said the dancer, smilingly. "Have you?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, for no particular reason. Only—I have been divorced myself—twice."

"The hell you have!" Freddie gasped. "Then I'm the third?"

"Yes, Freddie, darling. Do you mind?"

"Not me," said Freddie gallantly. "The third is always lucky."

The dancer threw her arms around his neck and kissed him on the lips.

"I love you, Freddie," she whispered.

"You've got nothing on me," said Freddie, and kissed her in return. A little red dab of paint remained on the side of his mouth as silent witness of the event.

"Say," he continued, "we'd better scoot back to Los Angeles and square things with that wouse."

"What wouse?"

"Why, that wouse that had the presumption to think he was going to marry you."

"You're the King of the Wouses," said the dancer affectionately. "What do you imagine the great King of Babylon is going to say?"

"Haven't the least idea," said Freddie. "I never was good at conundrums."

Freddie drove with one hand on the steering wheel and the other around the girl's waist.

"What grounds did your wife get a div-

orce on?" the dancer asked, after a long silence.

"Cruelty," said Freddie.

Maizie laughed.

"What did yours?" Freddie asked.

"Same thing."

"Both of 'em?"

"Uh, huh."

Then they both laughed happily.

"We're a pair, aren't we, Freddie?" chuckled the dancer.

"You said it," Freddie replied. "A pair of wouses."

The dancer gave the arm that encircled her waist an affectionate squeeze.

"When Ferdie learns that you've married the ugliest man in the company instead of the handsomest he'll have a cat fit," laughed Freddie.

"Say!" remonstrated the dancer. "Where'd you get that line of jazz-talk? If I'd picked this cast you'd have been the King of Babylon and Ferdie would have played the devil. That's all he's fit for." She snorted disgustedly.

Freddie began to sing softly.

*"Nebuchadnezzar, the King of the Jews,*
*Sold his wife for an old pair of shoes.*
*When the shoes began to wear,*
*Nebuchadnezzar began to swear."*

"He won't sell this wife," said Maizie happily. "Slow down going through town, Freddie, or we'll get pinched."

"No fear. I know all the cops."

They pulled up at the steps of the city hall.

"The King of Babylon is late," said Freddie.

"What did you do to his car?" inquired Maizie, her mind wandering back to the little incident that had preceded their departure.

"Just drained all the gas out," Freddie answered.

"You mean thing. Anything else?"

"Jarred a couple of screws loose. He'll be along presently."

They sat in the car and waited. Half an hour passed, and then the leading man's car drew majestically up to the curb. The "lying press agent," armed with a tremendous camera, was in the seat beside him.

"Sorry to be late, people," the leading man shouted gleefully. "But I had trouble with my car. Can we get the license now?"

"We've already got it," Freddie answered, kicking Maizie gently under the cover of the laprobe.

"Good enough. I 'phoned to the *Times* to have a reporter here. Ah! Here he is now."

"This is a good story," continued the leading man, addressing himself to the reporter who had been waiting uneasily at the head of the steps. "You see, Miss Pendleton, here, plays the part of Salome with the Wonder Film Corporation, and I'm the leading man—as you are aware. I play the part of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. As a matter of fact we're eloping—Miss Pendleton and I. 'KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR ELOPES WITH SALOME!' Get it?"

"Ye-s," said the reporter, dubiously.

"I'll give you all the dope and the pictures," interrupted the press agent, preparing to set up his camera on the steps of the city hall.

"Wait a minute," said Freddie quietly. "Let's get this thing straight. I play the part of Judas Iscariot in the same production as Salome and the kink, here. Maybe you'd better run the story this way: 'Judas has been up to his old tricks again, and steals Salome away from her lawful fiance, Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon.' That's a much better story. You see, we were married a couple of hours ago."

"Don't be an ass, Freddie," said the leading man nervously. "This is hardly the right time for joking."

"You're the ass, Ferdie—or the goat—I don't know which," said Freddie.

"What would Maizie marry you for?" parried the leading man, while conviction was slowly born in his soul.

"I don't know," replied Freddie. "Better ask the lady."

The leading man turned pale with anger and the ignominy of defeat.

"How about your wife back east?" he said malignantly. "Bigamy, you know, is a criminal offense."

"Divorced this afternoon," said Freddie,

handing him the telegram. "Married the minute after."

The leading man laughed hoarsely.

"You damn fool," he spluttered. "I sent that telegram for a joke. Can't you see it's a fake? I thought it might cheer you up a little on my wedding day."

Freddie was dumbfounded. The slip of paper fluttered to the pavement.

"Then we—we're—not—married," said Maizie weakly.

"You're sure NOT," said Ferdie.

"This is a good story after all," said the reporter. "What are the details of this affair?"

"The press agent will fix you up," said Freddie. Turning to Maizie, he said, "Come on, dearie, before I lose my temper and kill that skunk. Let's go. We won't let a perfectly good dinner at the Baron's go to waste, anyhow."

They sped off down the street, leaving the unhappy press agent to explain matters as best he could to the reporter.

But it was a very pathetic wedding-supper that was served at the Baron's that evening. Both were heartsick over their escapade, for both felt that, in a way, Ferdinand Hobart had held the winning trick, and they well knew that he would make the most of it.

Tears were in the dancer's eyes as she raised her glass of champagne to give her favorite toast.

*"Fweddie!*
*Here's to you—*
*And toward you—*
*For I've 'wuvved' you*
*Ever since I knowed you."*

"I'm sorry, little girl," said Freddie choking, "to have got you into a mess like this. I wouldn't have done it for worlds."

"If the worst comes to the worst I'll get a wieniewurst," said the dancer with a wan smile, trying to appear cheerful. But the effort was a failure and, shortly after, they decided to forego their evening's entertainment, and return home.

As she kissed Freddie good-night at her apartments, Maizie whispered, "I'll wait for you, dear. And you'll soon be free, won't you?"

Suddenly the ludicrous side of the situation flashed on Freddie, and he laughed gaily.

"Poor little orphan," he said, in his old care-free manner. "Only's got one father —and one mother."

Maizie laughed too.

"Ferdie's the fall guy," she comforted. "Not us."

Freddie took his departure, and Maizie took an elaborately trimmed silk *robe de nuit*, which a thoughtful maid had laid across the little white bed, folded it up and placed it away in a drawer.

"Not yet," she said to herself.

The telephone bell rang noisily.

" 'Ello," said Maizie, sleepily.

"Hello, darling," came an excited voice over the 'phone. "I'm coming right over. We *are* married after all. There was a telegram here from my wife saying that she really did get her divorce—yesterday."

"Are you quite sure?" said Maizie.

"Yep, ab-so-lute-ly. This is the straight goods this time. I verified it at the telegraph office."

"All right then—keet! Come 'n over."

Maizie hung up the receiver, a joyous smile on her cherry lips. She went to the drawer and took out an elaborately trimmed silk *robe de nuit* and laid it on the bed.

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NEXT month: THE SQUEALER *by Griswold Wheeler,* the story of a three cornered contest in which the best man wins as usual, although he is a bit handicapped by being in jail.

# EFFICIENCY—PLUS AND MINUS

BY NEWTON A. FUESSLE

*As a daily stint, a young man hurls ten thousand words into the mouthpiece of a dictaphone; but after business hours, his flow of conversation is singularly cut off at the source of supply, causing a great deal of embarrassment.*

ERT Williams, white, was a little under thirty and much overworked. He was assistant technical manager of the Maxon Motor Car Company. He was quiet and retiring, yet extraordinarily verbose. His job compelled him to talk incessantly from 8 A. M. until 5 P. M., except for an hour's noonday hiatus for breath and lunch.

Into the ear of his dictaphone on the big, flat-topped desk, he poured his day-long volley of words. Ten thousand was his daily average. Had it been fiction, he would have been producing a novel a week, and would have made E. Phillips Oppenheim fade into **a phantom rival.**

Bert Williams was the Delphic oracle of the technical division. He settled more wagers in an hour than Dan Patch ever did in a season. When two motor fans, just to settle a bet, wrote in asking foolish questions about R. P. M. and M. P. R., the technical manager grew incoherent and slid the letter across the desk to Assistant Manager B. Williams to answer what and why. And Williams could do it, too.

But outside the office, he had little to say. Not even on the infrequent occasions when he suffered himself to become one of the crowd of Detroit's motor wags who dangle from the Pontchartrain bar did he wax garrulous. The discussion of neither politics, Pilsener, the pronunciation of Przemysl, nor yet the prowess of Ralph de Palma ever drew him into sustained conversation.

Such, roughly, was the subject of our sketch. And the same would end right here, without ever blossoming forth into anything like a real story, had he not one fine April morning been put at the head of a force of girls, mostly blondes, to draw up an inventory of the plant.

In a daze he took his place in the midst of this charming circle. He took one look at one of his new assistants and he was never the same afterwards.

That summer the assistant technical manager bought a Palm Beach suit, numerous dinners for two at Arduzzi's and scores of round-trip tickets to Belle Isle. It was the first great hegira of his emotions into the strange realm of courtship.

Miss Mae Kelly, the most radiant creature that ever lived on Detroit's Elizabeth Street, would await him on her father's unassuming stoop. As soon as she saw him swing athletically off one of the Woodward Avenue trolley cars, she would rush into the house for another dab with the powder puff at her pretty nose, and for a latchkey against a possible, and probable, late return.

"Just think! He's assistant manager at the Maxon!"

Such was the comment of more than one awe-stricken and envious mother of an Elizabeth Street girl, as the Palm-Beached Bert strode toward the Kellys'. Never had Elizabeth Street beheld the persistent comings (the goings were at too late an hour to be perceived) of a better looking young wooer.

On the smooth deck of the Belle Isle excursion boat, Mae taught Bert to one-step and fox-trot. She let him hold her stenographic hand as they sat in some secluded nook by the rail. She let him pick up her lacey handkerchief from among the peanut shells that strewed the deck.

Conversationally, Mae was as free as the other was reticent. Her blithe chatter

dovetailed perfectly with the assistant technical manager's silence. For in the presence of this pink-cheeked young goddess, Bert was even more tongue-tied than usual when unhappily bereft of the magic rubber mouthpiece of his dictaphone and its accompanying bales and pyramids of unanswered business letters.

The conversation of these two would run somewhat as follows:

"Just look at the wonderful lights of the boat club. Aren't they too grand!" she exclaimed on one occasion. "It's for all the world like a picture."

"It is, for a fact," said Bert.

"Gee, but the water's dark," she pursued, gazing over the rail. "It always sort of scares me to look at it. Don't it you?"

"No-o."

"Well, I s'pose that's because you're a man, Mr. Williams. Men are brave. It's their nature, I suppose. I wish I was a man. Girls are such cats."

"Do you think so?" helplessly replied the man who often dictated over a hundred letters in a day.

He gazed adoringly at her face, sharply cut in profile against the glimmer of lights ashore, and cursed himself silently for his infernal helplessness.

Another time she said: "I hear the Recreation League out at the factory is talking about getting up another dance."

"That so?" said the man whose one hundred per cent efficiency in business sagged to a miserable zero in the bewildering presence of this girl.

"Their old dances don't interest me a little bit."

"Why not?"

"Why should they?" she returned. "I never go. Nobody I care anything about ever asks me."

With a thrill he pulled himself together resolutely and said: "Let's *us* go."

Like others in the maelstrom of modern industries, the assistant technical manager had been sacrificed by the god of efficiency on the altar of specialization. Let him address himself in business dictation to dealers, factory branches, or Maxon owners, and words flowed from him like the rapids at Niagara, with unerring fluency and precision. But let him look into the Danube blue eyes of the Elizabethan Mae, and the tidal wave congealed into veritable icebergs of absurd and exasperating silence.

Let him talk of steering knuckles, ammeters, crank shafts, knife switches, fuse blocks, plugs, and bezels, and the gods of volubility smiled propitiously. But let him attempt to blaze a verbal trail in the direction of the shivery chimes from the wedding belfry,—let him try to wring the subjunctive mood of courtship into the possessive case of betrothal,—and words fled in precipitate rout.

Getting engaged is a fifty-fifty matter of thumping hearts and gift of speech. Nor can *bon bons* take the place of *bons mots*.

Autumn came, and Mae was still punching the canny chronometer at the Maxon factory. The golden fortnight of the spring inventory had long since faded into the dross of her old grind in the specification department. But evenings she still saw the assistant technical manager with unfailing regularity and to the exclusion of each and all of the ardent youths who had once been callers at her home on Elizabeth Street.

One October night, Bert took Mae to the theatre. She forgot the latchkey, and on the hinge of this trivial circumstance an event of importance was destined to turn.

Bert kissed her goodnight and departed. Then she had to ring the front door bell to get in. Michael Kelly, her father, hastily donned trousers and carpet slippers, and, with his suspenders dangling grotesquely behind him, he threw open the door. He found his daughter in tears.

"Why, girl, what's the matter?" he demanded, rubbing his eyes.

"Nothing," she lied, as lovelorn damsels will.

"Sure there is," pressed the Irishman gently. "Come on. Tell your old dad."

The next moment she was sobbing on his nightshirted shoulder as if her heart would break.

"I know what's the matter!" exclaimed Kelly with a flash of sudden certitude. "This young fellow o' yours, who's been runnin' after you all this time, won't pop

the question—devil take him. He ought to be ashamed of himself."

"Don't dad!" begged Mae, beginning to cry again.

"I've a good mind to break every bone in his good-for-nothin' body,—makin' my poor little coleen cry like this. Why, this very night your ma's been remarkin' what a miserable trick it is for this boob to keep runnin' after you for no apparent good. Sure, he's a trifler, that's what he is."

"He's not!" denied the girl, her body straightening in protest.

"An' what is he then?" demanded Michael Kelly.

"He's a dear, sweet boy—that's what he is!"

"Then why was you cryin'?"

But Mae did not answer. She had already slipped through the dim doorway of her bedroom and had quietly closed the door.

"Good night, daddy," she called after a moment. "Go back to sleep now, dear."

Michael, shaking his head perplexedly, returned to his room.

"What was the matter with Mae?" asked the girl's mother. "Did I hear you havin' words with her?"

Michael told her. Fully an hour lasted the earnest conference which ensued.

Next morning, after Mae had finished her breakfast and hurried off to work, Michael and his wife sat discussing ways and means of mitigating the condition that grieved their parental hearts.

"Leave it to me!" said the mother eagerly, when Michael finally rose and put on his coat, and fared forth to have a look at the various contracting jobs he was managing.

The Maxon Motor Car Company's assistant technical manager was at his desk at a quarter of eight that morning, and long before the last cross town car had brought the last crowded human freight load of stragglers to the great plant, Bert was hurling the day's gust of dictation into the little instrument's revolving cylinders of sensitive wax.

But to-day, for some reason, beneath the stream of ready words which eddied off into brief office queries and memoranda, flowed into letters to owners, and swirled into long technical monographs to Maxon dealers, there was a strange and unwonted undercurrent of apprehension, of misgiving, and inexplicable foreboding.

At noon, he was preoccupied as he ate his lunch in the big, barnish eating room of the factory. Afterwards he dragged hard at his pipe, wondering what ailed him.

"Saw you at the show last night, old top," said the cub of the advertising department.

"That so?" replied the technical man of few words.

"Neat little dame you had with you."

Bert would have made a heated retort to the flippant remark had he been able to think of what to say. But while he was trying to clothe his resentment in fitting phrase, the other lit a cigarette and left the table.

The thing that disturbed and rankled Bert most that day was his abject failure the night before, as he held Mae in his arms at her front door, to measure up to the requirements of the glorious moment. Again and again had he striven to speak, but the right words had obstinately and utterly refused to be marshalled into line by the imperious trumpet call of his soul.

The noon mails had brought fresh trays of communications that demanded reply. Bert cast himself into the task with renewed zeal and unflagging vigor, glad to be able to drown his emotional woes in the new tidal wave of healing toil.

His practiced gaze zipped like a drill into the contents of each sheet of paper in turn that loaded the trays before him. Instantly the perfect mechanism of his efficient brain performed the correct evolutions. The reply would leap into brisk, crisp sentences and on into the avid ear of the dictaphone.

He dictated on and on, without break or pause, filling cylinder after cylinder, as they revolved obediently before him, with verbal grist for the typist who hammered it in turn into the finished letter.

As the afternoon wore on, and as Bert Williams (white, under thirty and overworked) kept the flood of his technical tale keyed up to its terrific speed, he forgot everything else in the world in the

heat of his concentration. The barometer of his one hundred per cent efficiency held clear and true to the assistant technical manager's unfailing and unwavering form. Replies to inquiries, complaints, and service kicks seemed literally to flow from subconscious depths into the swift monotone in which he talked.

All of a sudden his superior on the opposite side of the great, wide, flat-topped desk, stopped abruptly in his work. An odd and quizzical look shot into the department head's spectacled eyes. He was listening intently to his assistant's dictation.

"What the devil?" he gasped.

And about an hour later, Bert Williams's typist, the transmitter plugs in her ears, stopped abruptly in her furious typewriting. She had been startled by the buzz of strangely unwonted words running off the wax cylinder.

"Well—for—evermore!" she ejaculated.

She stopped the instrument's needle, turned it back, and listened in amazement to the repetition of the most surprising epistle which had ever filtered in Bert Williams's voice off a dictaphone's cylinder.

A third time she listened to the extraordinary letter, then turned with a grin to her typewriter, ran a fresh sheet of office stationery into it, and began drumming the keys. And this is the letter she wrote:

*Mrs. Michael Kelly,*
*Elizabeth Street,*
*Detroit, Michigan.*
*Dear Madam:*

*We have your letter of even date and note the character of your complaint.*

*We regret that you are dissatisfied with the attitude of our Mr. Williams, but are glad that you have brought the matter to our attention.*

*Our interpretation of your order is that you wish Mr. Williams to cease calling on your daughter Mae.*

*We regret to have to advise you that this is entirely impossible. Please let this letter constitute a record of his request to you and Mr. Kelly for her hand in marriage.*

*With regret that the matter has caused you any annoyance, and hoping that this adjustment of it will meet with your entire approval, we are*

*Very truly yours,*
*MAXON MOTOR CAR COMPANY*
*Per.....*

*BW|RA*

Late that afternoon, the assistant technical manager affixed his signature to it, and, still in his habitual daze of higher efficiency, sent it with a hundred others down to the mailing room.

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NEXT month: THE FIRE BUG *by William Hamilton Osborne,* setting forth another episode in the joint legal career of D. Dacres, counselor at law, and Gertie Gilfoil, law clerk. After every member of the local bar has declined the case, D. Dacres is assigned to defend a man who faces trial on twenty or more indictments.

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# THE WEDDING BUSINESS

BY ELWOOD BROWN

*"Constant excellence of product—the highest type of competition," says an ad.; but in this case, the constant excellence of Judge Bender's service in tying nuptial knots causes so much professional jealousy that competition is not so refined as it is keen.*

PERHAPS you have never heard of the time Judge Bender, the marrying justice, unknowingly put one over on Hawkins. The boomerang was thrown by Hawkins, but it missed Bender a mile and Hawkins got in front of the return trip.

We justices married couples for money, and the wedding business was quite a plum. While our salaries were pretty liberal, for we labored in a large city, we wanted as much of the luscious side line as possible. To get the business we employed solicitors, or "runners," on a commission basis, and they struggled nobly to bring in the bridal twains. The favorite stand of the runners was just outside the Marriage License Bureau, Cupid Carter's official quarter. When soon-to-be-married couples issued from the door, the runners would swoop down upon them and convoy them to the employing justice for the nuptial ceremony. It was a thrilling profession.

From the start Bender and Hawkins never hitched. Hawkins was an able chap, but peppery, and by nature abnormally jealous. In the hymeneal trade he ran a poor third for he had a miserable, bungling service; and a couple never recommended him to friends. Strangely, to himself, he blamed Bender—Bender, the matrimonial paragon.

Cutting in on the profits of our industry, though in but a small way, was a certain leech, a Reverend Burleigh Potter by name, a pussy-footed, fat-chested, sleek, roundish little whelp of a parson, who attracted business by parading back and forth, in the garb of his calling, where he could be seen from the License Bureau windows. His office was just across the street from the Court House. You know what he was after: the crumbs from the table.

Hawkins's business shrank and dwindled until in exasperation he arose one cloudy morning and fired his runner. This gentleman, a great hulking chap, Audrey Stevens by name, a former country preacher, took his dismissal with poor grace. Hawkins told him he was a rotten business getter, who picked the most miserable line of foreign trade. He concluded with the pointed observation: "The last six couples left exactly four dollars. Of this I get just forty cents. None of them knew enough English to tell whether I was giving them ten years or life. And they thought it my *duty* to marry them. And worse. The last bridegroom could speak but three American words: 'Geev' me cigars,' he greased out. He thought *I* was the one to give presents. And his wife kissed me! Ugh! Do you call that profitable business? You are discharged!"

Hawkins didn't tell me Stevens's reply, but it leaked out. "What inducement is there for a couple to get married before you?" he shot out. "A salesman is no better than his line of goods. How can I deliver? Your crabby features, your mumbling, quick-to-get-a-bad-job-done service is only good enough for the cheap trade! Why don't you stick to law—you're smart enough at that—and let Bender do what nature qualified him to do? Good-by!"

Runnerless, the remnant of Hawkins's wedding business raveled away to almost nothing. And then, the first thing we knew, the disgruntled justice brought forth a plan to eliminate the runner system entirely.

"I don't like it!" he opened up in his aggressive way. "It isn't refined."

"You mean," returned Bender slyly, "the bridal pair won't walk into your parlor."

Hawkins was nettled, but kept himself in control. His next remark was a business gem. "Gentlemen, why take half when we can get all?"

That philosophy found me at home. You see, I wasn't doing so tremendously much better than Hawkins; my runner used to be a seller of soap and worked that in with his matrimonial soliciting. When he couldn't persuade a couple to eternal bliss, he tried to make them clean. I didn't like it.

"It sounds feasible to me," I supported. "We'll get practically as many weddings without the runners. We can pool our interests, lump the fees, and divide equally three ways."

Judge Bender frowned. The wedding business was his little gold mine, oil gusher and coupon bearer all in one. I know how he felt—that "why divvy with weak sisters" attitude. He was doing more than Hawkins and I combined. The marrying justice possessed a most pleasing little home, tastefully fitted up for evening weddings. He was a matrimonial artist, with his benignant, beaming, cheery face, deep-toned but softly modulated voice and fatherly manner. To be married by Judge Bender was a treat. And he was a past master at fee-getting. Upon the completion of the ceremony when the bridegroom asked: "What is a reasonable fee?" Bender would look lingeringly and admiringly at the feminine end of the life contract and murmur, "As you have received—" The reply ended in a climax of visual appreciation for the bride. The dollar bridegroom invariably raised to two, while a spendthrift jumped to ten.

So, naturally, Judge Bender frowned. But he was of the conciliatory nature and inclined toward peace. "I am not particularly enamored of the present system, but you know very plainly that even when dividing with Mr. Converse, my runner, I am doing handsomely. However, if you will consent to my retaining forty per cent of the gross, you to divide sixty between you, it will be agreeable."

Hawkins, with me on his side, saw his opportunity and, with more friendliness than usual, struggled to reduce Bender to the equal basis. Finally we were successful.

"I dread to throw Mr. Converse out of work," sighed Bender. "There's a man with a heaven-given talent!"

The runner had more than talent,—he was a genius, the finest matrimonial soother and persuader ever developed to the art. A Harvard graduate, a student of Keats and Browning, an immaculate dresser, a man of pleasing countenance and cultivation, and, strangely, a lover of his strange business, he had thrived and prospered. He easily averaged eight dollars a day.

When an embarrassed couple emerged from Cupid Carter's Bureau, Converse met the pair in the hall. Avoiding even a suggestion of cheap solicitation he usually opened in a friendly tone: "I am a friend of the Judge's. Let me help you to avoid undue embarrassment by directing you to a quiet place. I know just how you feel. A dear little wife at home myself."

In a few moments he had them at their ease and headed for Bender's court, talking to the near bride about his wife's muffins. Or, on occasion, he would quote a tender passage from Browning or Tom Moore. In short, Converse was irresistible. From the sprightliest of jest to the tenderest of sentiment, he ranged in perfect harmony.

He took the dismissal badly. Bender broke the news as gently as he could, even offering to help secure him a clerkship, but Converse loved his work too well. He left, breathing revenge to the last.

The first month's division of the wedding fees on the new basis was splendid, each of us receiving $140; and Hawkins felt almost kindly toward Bender.

But the cheering improvement did not last long, for the next month the fees sagged to one hundred; and when the banner month of June swung by and we netted only sixty-five dollars each, Hawkins became suspicious. Very much agi-

tated he came into my chambers late one afternoon and blurted out:

"I am convinced Bender is holding out! He was honest the first month, but he can't hold up to it!"

I have always thought well of Bender. "Don't be too hasty," I advised. "There may be legitimate fluctuations in the business."

"You're wrong! I've looked up statistics. Couples swarm in June," he snapped back. "Bender is retaining!"

"But times are abnormal," I answered lightly. "We have the War. Crops are poor. Maybe it's Wall Street. You can always blame Wall Street. The bears haven't covered well."

I was joking of course, but he cut me off sharply, "He's stealing!"

I shrugged my shoulders in disapproval, and then his eyes lit up brightly. "I have an idea!"

"Jitney judges aren't supposed to have them," I broke in.

He paid no attention, but talked right on. "I surmise Bender's doing a full wedding calendar at his home evenings. We'll fix a plant!"

"How so?"

"We can't afford to allege without evidence. Before I was elected I controlled a lot of cheap clients. I know a number of fellows that wanted to get married but lacked initiative. Now my plan is to rig up several marriages, loan money for rings and marriage fees if necessary and ship them out to Bender's for the ceremony. We'll catch him if he doesn't turn in the money; you remember we agreed on fullest of reports. We'll have our couples for evidence."

"I don't enthuse," I remarked. "Still if you want to advance the money I'll file no demurrers. Moreover I'd enjoy watching the show."

That very afternoon I learned something that made me sit up very straight. I was out on a little water excursion, and feeling a bit tired went to my stateroom. The boat was a ratty, old one, without complete partitions between quarters and soon a low familiar voice came drifting to my ears. It belonged to Cupid Carter. The one that answered was high-pitched and twangy, and it took me several moments to place it as the property of the Reverend Burleigh Potter! Reverend Potter who sought the crumbs, you will remember. The theme was the wedding business.

Cupid was going crooked and it pained me. "These justices take too much time from their bench work to marry people," he was saying. "It isn't right. Now I am entitled to a share in the game and I'm going to get it. I will recommend every couple that wants a preacher-wedding to you, and a few who don't. We'll split, fifty-fifty."

"Pick out the good business," came back the purring notes of the pastor. Then came a silence and his voice changed as he delved more deeply into his thoughts: "Say—ah—er, don't you think, as I perform the labors, that I should receive a little larger per cent, perhaps sixty?"

Cupid didn't like it and there was acid in his voice as he answered: "One-half is more than fair to you. As custodian of the License Bureau don't I *control the business?* Of course, if you are not satisfied—"

Potter found it profitable to be satisfied, Carter continued: "I'm turning out about fifty couples a day. About sixty per cent get married in a *civilized* way. The balance should come to you."

"Isn't my ceremony as civilized as any other?" the Reverend Potter spluttered. "Except in rushes I give them both Mendelssohn's and the Lohengrin Wedding March. What more could be asked for $2.50? In slack times I throw in orange blossoms on the chance of netting a five."

"It pays to treat 'em liberal," commented Cupid. Then in lowered voices they discussed profits.

When Hawkins called me into his office to watch him clinch his evidence, I told him nothing of Cupid's deflection. If there might be a salutary lesson in store for the irritating justice, well and good.

Hawkins's exhibits were as well designed for a circus as a courtroom. He had a pair of freaks that were immense. A long, skinny beanpole, arrayed in the garb of the male, with a fade-away chin,

watery eyes, straw shocked hair and the smile of a ewe lamb, was planned as the life partner of a rolling, heaving, red-faced tonnage of human love-sickness that cast its eyes with the fond light of an all embracing, protecting love upon its life's selection.

Following my introduction to this contemplative evidence, Hawkins tackled a pair of grease exuding Italians.

"Now, Enrico Umberto Lombrosio," he advised, "make the plunge. Swim out. Expand. You want the biggest banana business in town, but you are afraid of Louisa!"

"Notta the girla," denied the son of Italy, "so mucha the costa. Louisa too expense!"

"I'll give you a lift. Five dollars for the ring, five for incidentals and wedding fee. Be sure to be married by Justice Bender. Tell him you want to go out to his house. You see, I would marry you myself, but I am new to the game. When any of my old friends come before me I don't feel comfortable. Judge Bender will make you feel like a brother."

Exhibit C, the male half of the pair of Swedes, was harder to line up. The bashful swain had grown indifferent.

"Yulya," began the light haired son of the North, "she ban too slow; too long. I want one fine little girl yet."

"Got one in mind?"

"No, yust looking."

"Stay with Julia. No lively little woman would have you. Don't wait till you're an old man before you get your judgment. I saw Julia with a handsome American."

"Where?" broke in the Swede, jealous on the instant.

"Never mind. Close up the deal this evening. If you need a dollar or two, see me. But don't ask me to marry you. Go to Judge Bender."

The best of plans—and Hawkins's was not so bad, for he coached his nuptial witnesses carefully—often go amiss. The boomerang the justice aimed followed the usual habit of boomerangs, but in rather a roundabout way. I'll tell the story as it presented itself to me.

I didn't expect ever to see the bridal pairs again, though I awaited developments with some anticipation.

Hawkins was so emphatically sure of trapping Judge Bender that you may imagine my amazement when, two days after the scheme was under way, as I was coming up the courthouse steps to enter my chambers, without warning I ran upon Hawkins's "planted" couples, all three of them, coming toward me, and in the fore was the magnetic Converse!

I fairly gurgled in my amazement. In what marvelous manner had the sextet switched? Not only was Converse in the fore, but he was dripping metaphors, hyperboles and pure English in bubbling profusion by the wayside; and those couples looked supremely happy.

Fortunately Converse did not see me, as I quickly sprang behind a statue of the father of our country.

"You can be married," Converse was purling along, "in a pretty little home, with flowers, sunshine and the softest and sweetest of music. The fragrant scent of orange blossoms, the resting, soothing benediction of a goodly man upon you, the—"

"You ban great," broke in the big Swede. "Yulya, I feel like crying for the old mutter back home—"

"Mucha da class," added the Dago. "Louisa, I love you better than alla th' banan' in the wida world."

The freaks seemed to be struggling with unrelievable emotions. Converse went on, never cracking a smile, but attending strictly to the business in hand.

Where could he be going? With whom was he now in partnership? Surely not the Reverend Burleigh Potter.

Not caring to follow the brigade of matrimonial cohorts, but anxious to note developments, I hastened to a convenient courtroom window to view proceedings.

Up the street they went, as comical a band of misfits as ever sun shone upon. The banana king, tightly clutching his adorable Louisa, the Swedish pair, cluttering over the entire width of sidewalk and the freaks, lovingly bringing up the rear, were only less interesting than the fashionable Converse, nattily attired, out there in front, lightly swinging a pearl handled cane.

And then unexpected things began to happen and with speed. The door of Reverend Potter's parlors swung open and the fat little preacher, hands wide extended in welcome, invited the party in. He could be seen looking up at Cupid Carter's windows as if for instructions.

The sextet halted, started a flank movement toward the door and suddenly I caught Converse's sharp command.

"Don't go in there! It is not the place!" came the staccato order.

There came a storm of protest, and I could see Potter losing much of his dignity, fighting for his seeming rights. His charlatan hypocrisy completely melted in the fear of a loss of wholesale business. "These people were directed to me!" his shrill little voice carried through the air. "They are mine I tell you, mine!" he raged.

The Swedes, amazement on their faces, stood in uncertain attitudes, while Enrico and Louisa, from wonder turned to anger.

"The gama I see!" challenged the banana prince. "You marry for mon! Busines', so. I know. Fatta commish!"

The rising tones of altercation ascending attracted spectators to the courthouse windows, Judge Hawkins among them.

"Look!" I exclaimed. "There goes your evidence!"

One look at Converse, and Hawkins, jumping at horrible conclusions, started for the stairs.

"Wait!" I exclaimed. "Don't lose your head. See! There is more coming."

From out an entrance further up the street a big, brawny figure emerged. He was clothed in the solemn garments of the ministry, but Hawkins, keenly observing, recognized the bulking form of his erstwhile runner.

"Audrey Stevens, the ex-minister!" he ejaculated. "There's where our business has been disappearing! He's joined forces with Converse! What a team!"

The huge new comer bore down upon the gathering and I could plainly see the perplexity on his sober face. And then the commercial battle threatened to turn into a riot. It was undoubtedly the fiercest competitive struggle in the annals of matrimony.

Ranged beside Converse the redoubtable Stevens, extending both hands before him, tried to quiet the tumult, but Potter's protesting voice rose wailingly above the din.

Then, as matters rose to a climax Hawkins and I were suddenly gripped by a pair of heavy hands on our shoulders and the hearty voice of Justice Bender boomed in our ears:

"Immense, isn't it? And to think, I married those three couples this morning!"

For Justice Hawkins it was certainly a chastening of spirit. Most fortunately for him Bender never learned of the intended plot. The marrying justice was a powerful man when enraged.

Of course you have guessed how it all came about. The polyglot couples went to Judge Bender to arrange for the ceremony. The justice had recently learned of the activities of runner Converse, now his enemy, and the presence of the several pairs gave him his inspiration. He would let Converse work on already signed up business!

In short, he married them all around early in the morning, and sent them back to Cupid Carter's on a pretext. The sextet had been instructed very carefully by Bender as to their actions when approached by the star runner. The Swedes had more brains than their exteriors called for, while Enrico Umberto Lombrosio was as crafty a little man as ever sold green fruit.

I didn't tell you just the exact finish of that strife out on the sidewalk in front of Potter's. There was one flare-up and sudden quiet.

The son of Italy, sensing the dramatic moment and feeling the fire of battle kindled to the inspiration of love, suddenly mounted the Reverend Potter's steps and with magnificent gestures proclaimed:

"Listen. I speak! Shama all you! Shama! Never I mix busines' with love for my Louisa! Louisa, my gooda wife! Judge Bend', he marra all of us; all this morna! I marra for love! You marra for money. You worse than rotten banan!"

That speech and what it stood for sounded the death knell of the runner system and started a reform of the wedding business.

# SMITH'S WIFE

BY HOWARD DWIGHT SMILEY

*Pie is high in any lunch room where the invoice is a green ticket with a hole in it; but with public opinion favoring pie, Smith's wife simply has to boost the price another notch or two.*

EALTH!" snorted Bagley, kicking a two-thousand-dollar sack of gold-dust under the bunk. "Wealth!" he repeated, in the tone of voice you used the day you went fishing and it rained.

"What's consuming you?" I inquired.

"There ain't anything consuming me, and—and *vice versa*," he answered, cross as a bear in a trap.

"*Vice versa*," said I, "who's he?"

"He!" answered Bag, in his rainy-day voice. "Who said anything about 'he'?" If you only understood the simple rudiments of the American tongue, you'd know that *vice versa* means the other way. There ain't anything consuming me and I ain't consuming anything—that's fit to eat."

"Oh," said I, taking my feet off the stove, "if, by that, you mean to infer that my cooking—"

"I ain't casting any reflections on your cooking," he interrupted. "You *can* cook, if you only had the where-all to do it with. That's what I'm kicking about.

"Look at that," he continued, pointing at the sacks of gold-dust that were piled up against the wall like cord wood. "Wealth, wealth beyond the dreams of John D. Avarice! But what good is it doing us, I'd like to know? Why, there is enough gold stacked up against that wall to buy all the ham and eggs in York State, if we were only there."

"Well, that's consoling, ain't it?" I said. "We're going to start for there just as soon as Smith gets back with that pack team. In the meantime, just calm yourself and have some beans."

"Beans!" he answered, out of his mouth, with both lungs pushing. "Do you think that all I am made for is to eat beans? I want some pie and some milk that is out of a real cow, 'stead of a tin one, and I want some coffee to put it in. I've been laboring in these diggings all winter, shovelling, drilling, blasting, and washing, and doing it all on beans. Beans for breakfast, beans for dinner, beans for supper, et cetera, till I am ashamed to look the bean sack in the face. It's pie I'm hankering for now. Do you understand? Pie!"

"Well, I reckon you can have some," said a sweet feminine voice, coming from nowhere in particular and most any old place in general.

There may be a few things left in this mundane sphere that can stir up my cerebro excitant enough to cause a period of momentary aberration, and that was one of them. When I come to, I was on my feet with a .45 Colt in one hand and the frying-pan in the other; Bag was under the table, and in the doorway stood a lady.

Try and imagine my feelings; there was Bag and me in the midst of the Seven Devils, with the free and independent state of Idaho stretched all around us, and not another living soul within a hundred miles of us, that we knowed of; and there was Bag hankering out loud for pie, when, suddenly, out of the midst of the solitudes, that female speaks up and says: "Well, I reckon you can have some."

"Would you mind," I asked, as soon as I could get my voice back into my mouth, "telling an anxious inquirer where in the hotel you dropped down from?"

"Weiser," she answered. "I've got your pack team here. I'm his wife."

"His wife?" I asked, "who's *he?*"

"Why, Mr. Smith, of course, who'd you suppose?"

I wasn't supposing, I was getting beyond that. "Oh!" said I.

"Yes," she continued, "Mr. Smith and I were married in Weiser three weeks ago and started for camp together, but he broke his leg about three days back and I had to leave him and come on alone. I've got him fixed up nice and comfortable though, with plenty to eat and my Bible, so's he won't get lonesome. He said for me to tell you to pack right up and start back just as soon as ever you could."

"Yes, ma'am," said I, thinking of the Bible. Give me time and I can reconcile myself to most conditions, but the idea of her leaving that heathen a Bible to keep him from getting lonesome hit my funny-bone such a whack that I wanted to just double up.

The only Bible that ever appealed to Smith was the one that he carried habitual, in his inside vest pocket. It consisted of fifty-two pages, put together on the loose-leaf system, with thirteen illustrations, including the joker.

Still, that was her credential. The fact that Smith was wedded to a lady who could induce him to remain alone in the wilds and fastnesses of the Seven Devils, with nothing but a broken leg and a Bible for company, was sufficient in itself to convince me that she must be all right.

"Yes, ma'am," I said. "We'll be packed up and under way the first thing in the morning."

"All right; and if you'll build a fire in that stove I'll bake you that pie," she said, to Bag.

"Well, I'll be slammed," he answered, or words to that effect, and I wasn't blaming him much either.

"Sir," said she, with her nose on a bias, "I took you for a gentleman."

"Well, what do you take me for now?" he asked. "A piece of cheese?"

"That'll go better with pie than your conversation will with a lady," she retorted.

"You shut up and get busy with that fire. You're going to get what you've been hankering for now," said I to Bag, and went out to look at the pack team.

Bag and I slept under the stars that night, giving Mrs. Smith the privacy of the shack. We were up bright and early, and while Bag and I packed the gold and the rest of our belongings on the mules, Mrs. Smith got breakfast.

While we were eating it she went over to her pack and dug out a quart bottle of whisky

"Mr. Smith bought this so you could drink a parting toast to the camp," said she. "He wanted to bring more, but I wouldn't let him."

"Didn't he keep any for himself?" I asked.

"My husband can't drink whisky and be my husband!"

"Bill *is* a good old soul, ain't he?" I remarked, thinking of that Bible.

Bag emptied his coffee out and reached for the bottle.

"The moment has arrived," said he, "that I have looked forward to for many long and ard'ous months. I came to these parts a lone and unpecunious stranger; I am leaving them rich beyond the dreams of old Creosote. Fill up," said he, passing the bottle to Mrs. Smith.

"Thank you," she answered, "I never indulge; I'll drink mine in coffee."

So Bag and I filled our cups and he continued:

"Old shack," said he, with his eyes on the rafters, "as I gaze on your rough and smoke-blackened walls, that have so long sheltered me and mine comrades, and which I am now leaving, alas, forever, a feeling akin to —— to ——"

"Here's how," said I.

"Same to you," he answered, and we drank the toast.

I'm about as decently familiar with inebriative liquor as the next man, but I never had anything get into the upper story quite so quick as that dose did. Inside of ten minutes things began to swim, and in about two more I saw that it was time to move. I was just able to get on my feet and that was all; everything in the shack was romping around like a merry-go-round.

I remember making a grab for the table when it went past, but missed it and went down in a heap. Next thing I knew I had walked over a precipice and began to fall;

I fell and fell, until I began to wonder when I was going to hit bottom. Then I struck a hill and started rolling; bumping and banging along so hard that I commenced to wake up and realize that some one was shaking me.

"'S'matter?" I asked, with both eyes shut.

"Wake up," said a voice that I supposed had a broken leg; and I opened my eyes to find Smith standing over me.

"'S'matter?" I asked again.

"You've been doped," he answered.

He had to fuss around for quite a spell before he could get Bag and me in a condition so that we could understand what had happened.

"It's all my fault," he explained. "I met that woman in a concert hall, down in Weiser, one night; and during an earnest conversation, both liquid and vocal, I imparted to her valuable information appertaining to our whereabouts and the frenzied state of our finances.

"I didn't think any more about it until yesterday, when I met her and a man two miles down the trail. The first intimation I had of their presence in that vicinity was a request from the man to hold up my hands, and, as he was backing it up with an iron argument, I had to comply. He tied me to a tree and kept me company until the lady returned this morning with the pack train. Then they took my boots and gun and turned me loose, while they went over the hills and far away."

"Where's my boots?" yelled Bag. "I'm going after them."

"She has taken all our boots," answered Smith. "We can't travel."

"Then you ain't married after all?" I asked.

"Married? Certainly I'm married," answered Smith.

"And what's become of your wife?" I asked.

"My wife?" said he. "She's in Homestead, Pennsylvania, or at least she was the last time I heard of her. But what's she got to do with this affair?"

"Nothing," I answered, thinking of that Bible.

"FORTUNE has cracked many a joke, but Death's jokes are better." A mouse built a nest in the skull of Talbot; the body of Milton was dismembered by a crew of drunken revelers; the skull of Swift, the master of satire, was satirized by a select body of M.D.'s. For still another of Death's jokes, read THE HEAD OF CROMWELL *by Vincent Starrett.* It will be included in the February number.

# HEEL MARKS OF A HERO

BY WARD WINCHELL, U S. N.

*Having been under fire at Manila when the United States Navy executed a writ of ejectment, a midshipman thirsts for further thrills. After battling in the dark with a cobra de fibrilla, he is quite satisfied.*

HE was a graduated Midshipman, out of Annapolis just long enough to begin to suspect that there might be, somewhere in the world, a Commanding Officer who knew as much as he about things in general, and how a ship should be run, in particular.

It had been his rare good fortune to take part in that Sunday morning target practice at Manila, on the ever memorable First of May—Spain's moving day. He did not get the idea that he was a hero, until the home papers began to arrive, months afterwards; but when he caught the idea he took it violently.

Later on, with the rest of the navy, he had "assisted" in the assault on Manila, by hammering the old stone fort at Malate. While the heavy guns had played their deep diapason of war, he had performed a staccato solo on a little machine gun mounted in the bow of a captured Spanish steam-launch. The volunteer army so covered itself with a mixture of swamp mud, mosquito bites and glory, that a great flock of promotions for valor flew out of Washington desks, and lit in all kinds of unexpected if well-deserved places.

After this experience our hero was frequently heard to say with envy, "Every time the Navy does anything, the Army gets ten new Brigadier Generals."

But he did not originate this—it was a quotation from some older navy pessimist.

To further add to the good opinion he had of himself, he had talked with Aguinaldo as man to man; knew the electrical vibrations of Admiral Dewey's voice when the "Old Man" was getting a move on things, and had seen an Army General in pajamas. And if these were not honors enough for a midshipman, he could point out to you the mistakes of the Army, just like any old naval officer, who has accustomed himself by a long course of training to see motes without going to the trouble of removing beams.

One day, somebody possessed with a puissant pen, and sitting in a swivel chair at a Washington desk, wrote an illegible signature at the bottom of a bit of typewritten stuff. Straightway words flashed across continents and dove under seas, and the ship our hero honored with his presence began making her homeward-bound pennant, and, a week later, flung it to the breeze, and started on a thirteen-thousand mile journey to New York.

We shall spare the reader the details of that long trip home. Nor shall we tell how our hero bought sea shells at Singapore, which had not been cleaned, and which scented up his room with an "ancient and fish-like" smell compared with which Trinculo's monster would have been heliotrope. Neither shall we reveal the details of his encounter with a Singhalese street-hawker, who wore long hair, a tortoise-shell comb and a white dress, and who looked like a bearded lady, but had withal such a voice of piratical persuasion that he sold our hero a genuine cat's eye (made of polished sea-shell) for $5 after many feminine tears and reluctant descents from his original price of $50.

It is enough to say that, by the time the ship reached Bombay, our hero had been fleeced so often he really felt quite knowing. Having gone half way around the world, he knew the difference between a Yokohama "rickshaw" and a Hongkong "sampan;" had drunk "stingas" at the Sing-

apore Club; bought a sapphire at Colombo, a pigeon-blood ruby at Bombay, and now he was feigning that his healthy young stomach liked hot curry and "Bombay duck" for tiffin.

He had also added to his experience by looking at the Parsee Towers of Silence, where the dead are lain in rows to be eaten by buzzards, and had seen a Hindoo plague corpse reduced to a handful of ashes sifting through a burning woodpile, and, with an eye to detail, had noted that the smoke smelled only of sandal wood.

But with all these experiences, he was still unsatisfied.

India is, above all other places, the land of strange adventures. Now that he was there, our hero longed to kill a tiger or have an adventure with a cobra.

He was not at all modest about these ambitions. Indeed, he so abused a young man's privilege of talking about himself that all his messmates became experts on killing snakes and tigers. At last, after much vain wishing, he had his adventure with a cobra.

He and a few messmates had put up at a hotel some distance from Bombay. After dinner there was a dance in honor of the heroes from Manila.

He had a waltz with an English girl who did not consider it good form to reverse. She was not interested in Manila, knew little about tiger slaying and less about cobras, and all these limitations, being combined in one girl, made him tired.

They parted with mutual satisfaction, she going to her chaperon and he sauntering over the grass of the compound to a secluded spot where a reclining wicker chair invited repose. Lying back in this and lighting a Manila perfecto, he gave himself up to the pleasing delight of passing in mental review all the girls he had ever loved. As he was two and twenty, behind him stretched a long line of experience with broken hearts for milestones.

Lulled by the mellow music and soothed by the cigar, he must have dozed, for he failed to notice a stealthy rustle in the grass under his chair, and was undisturbed by the motions of the long, slender thing that glided this way and that, and then curled itself into sinuous, graceful folds.

With a start, he awoke from an ugly dream in which a cobra had coiled on his chest.

In the dark he could not recall for a moment where he was. Then the distant lights and the music brought it all back. He lazily stretched and rubbed his hand down his vest buttons to reassure himself that the dream was but a dream. Swinging around, he rose to a sitting position and, still stretching and gaping, he brought his right foot down on the grass.

Horrors! It rested on something that squirmed and wriggled—a snake. Undoubtedly a cobra, and he was stepping on it! Then he did a bold thing. The snake had not struck, hence his foot must be on either the head or the neck, and so, despite the suddenness of the shock, he bore down with all his weight. The soles of his dancing pumps were thin, and under the instep he could feel the snake straining this way and that in strong efforts to free itself, but so long as he could hold it he was safe.

It is a hard job to stand on a squirming snake in the dark, and it showed no symptoms of dying, but seemed to get more desperately lively the harder he pushed it down into the soft grass. If he could but get his other heel on its head, perhaps he could hold it better. But on which side of his foot was that wicked head with the wide hood?

He stamped savagely down with the left foot close to the right one, carefully keeping all his weight on the squirming neck. Ah! Something was there which mashed, but whether head or body, he could not tell. Extending his foot further to the left, he stamped again; evidently the body extended to the left.

By inches he pounded and mashed and ground the body into the grass as far to the left as he could reach without lifting his weight from the right foot on the neck. Evidently it was a big snake, and the head with its deadly venom was to the right.

If he could only twist his left foot far enough around to mash that head! One can do this nice balancing feat in the gymnasium, but to be treading in the dark on

slippery death, and then attempt it,—that's quite another matter. Something had to be done soon, for the cobra was exerting more and more force. It seemed to be growing stronger, despite the injuries he had inflicted—or was he growing weaker?

But what was that? Oh, blessed sound! The growling and half-suppressed barking of a dog under the chair! It had seen the cobra and was attacking it. He eagerly urged on his new ally with all his powers of canine persuasion, but it seemed loth to attack and remained snarling and growling under the chair. Perhaps it was a native dog and understood only Hindustani. Hoping against hope, he continued encouraging it by sounds which under ordinary circumstances would nerve a timid cur to spit in the face of a bulldog.

Things were come to a desperate pass now, for as soon as the dog had made himself heard, the snake had put forth a supreme effort and had succeeded in slipping a bit to the right. It was but a question of time when it would be free. Press how he would, it was getting loose. Already an inch or so had slipped away, and at any moment the head might be so freed as to be able to turn and strike death into his veins.

Even as this thought struck him, he felt more of it slipping. Making a quick backward spring, he reached the seat of the chair, and standing there with every nerve thrilling, he heard the released cobra glide through the grass toward the dog, which at once stopped growling and became ominously silent. Was it possible that the snake had killed it so quickly? He bent over, listening and vainly trying to peer through the thick darkness. Then a happy thought came—the matches in his pocket.

The box was almost empty. In his haste and nervousness, he broke the first two. Cursing the modern commercial instinct that leads the Japanese to imitate European manufacturers in all things save quality, he lighted one by one the four remaining "Saker-hets-Tandstickors made in Kobe." They went out immediately.

The burning head flew off one, however, and by its fitful glare he had a vision of the dog lying near the foot of the chair, with the snake coiled around its neck. Knowing that the cobra is not a constrictor and not likely to coil around the neck if its victim, he distrusted this fleeting vision as an optical illusion.

For a long while he stood on the chair, trying to make up his mind to make a jump and run for the hotel, but the way led through the grass, and where there was one cobra it was likely there was more. Besides, he was unnerved. Let any one stand on slippery death for ten minutes and note the effect on the nerves.

He called for help.

A few minutes later three of his messmates had started for him, armed with such improvised weapons as could be hastily secured. "Bring a light," yelled the afflicted one, and an ornamental Chinese lantern was taken from the piazza.

"What's the matter, Charlie," said number one, "has your cigar gone out?"

"Be careful! There's a cobra right under this chair. He killed a dog there just a minute ago."

"Nonsense," said number two, swinging the lantern under the chair. "Here's a pup, sure enough, but he's a mighty lively corpse judging by the way he's chewing on that rope. What have you been drinking?"

"Oh, I didn't *see* him. I stepped on him right here. Look where I mashed him into the grass."

They looked. Then number three picked up the native rope with which the pup was tied to the chair. It was loosely woven fibre, thick, soft, and with sundry flat places mashed into it where Charlie's heel had dug fiercely into its soft texture. "There's your cobra," said he, fitting it into its print on the grass.

A few moments later, four young naval heroes lined up at the bar, where some warm champagne was broached at rupees ten the bottle. Over the drink and in consideration therefor, they swore eternal secrecy.

"Charlie," said one, solemnly, as he drank, "you've got to do one of two things. Either swear off, or buy a mongoose."

"There's still another solution," said number two. "What's the matter with his marrying a snake-charmer?"

(*Continued from page 2*)

Humor and clever characterization are the strong points of *Settled Out of Court*. The author does a most difficult thing in bringing two extremes of humanity together and picturing them consistently from every angle. Although there is an array of minor characters, they are so arranged in the background as to enhance the strength of the principals. The dialogue is crisp and to the point and in keeping with the character of the speakers. The natural humor and complications, and the presentation of a variety of everyday characters, converge well in the logical and satisfying conclusion of a story whose prime intention is to entertain.

*According to the Light of Weasel* carries in its name the most comprehensive comment that could be made upon the story. Mary Ellen is one of those poor, withered flowers that refuse to die in sordid places; and Weasel, a character right out of the book of life. Brought to a realization of himself as he is, he goes about retribution in the only way he knows—according to his light. The characters, plot and setting are blended into a convincing whole and presented with a rare appeal.

Good characterization through speech and action, and a certain sureness of touch, make *The Crazy Chris Lode* a very readable story, in the tone of which is conveyed the tacit request to enjoy if you will and credit if you can. Faith rather than understanding leads one through the intricacies of Chris' preparedness device for self-destruction, and it is somewhat of a relief to emerge into the clearer passages of the denouement, in which Chris, through the pleasant patronage of eleventh-hour luck, is discovered to be not a corpse, but a capitalist.

It is doubtful whether real life vagabondia is as much given to self-immolation as it is to self-preservation; but granted that it is, the sacrifice of the prodigal in *His Brother's Keeper* is wholly unnatural. Hardened criminals do not give up their lives simply to escape going to prison, and the *camouflage* stunt to save the younger brother could have been accomplished just as well without the slaughter. The author has tried to make the story one of supreme sacrifice, but he has not made the object of the sacrifice strong enough.

*The Little Tin Box* is an effective analysis of the relation of unbalanced nerves to crime. Morgan's impulse to sport with Johnson's drug weakness is the natural result of his resentment of the latter's espionage and his own morbid reflections on the "damn buzzards below." That Johnson, too, is suffering from "nerves," gives the author two strong motives to ride tandem, which he does with laudable success. The ending is dramatic, and the inevitable one forecast throughout the story.

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The Fourteenth Contest comprises the stories in this issue, (January); and all lists must be received at the office of the BLACK CAT, Salem, Mass., before February 1st. Prizes will be awarded February 10th; and the result of the contest will be announced in the April BLACK CAT; issued March 15th.

A PRIZE of $25 will be awarded to the author of the story which is selected as the best story of the month by the largest number of club members.

A PRIZE of $10 will be awarded to the member sending in the best criticism.

A PRIZE of $5 will be awarded to the member sending in the next best criticism.

PRIZES of $2.50 EACH will be awarded to members whose criticisms rank third and fourth in the contest.

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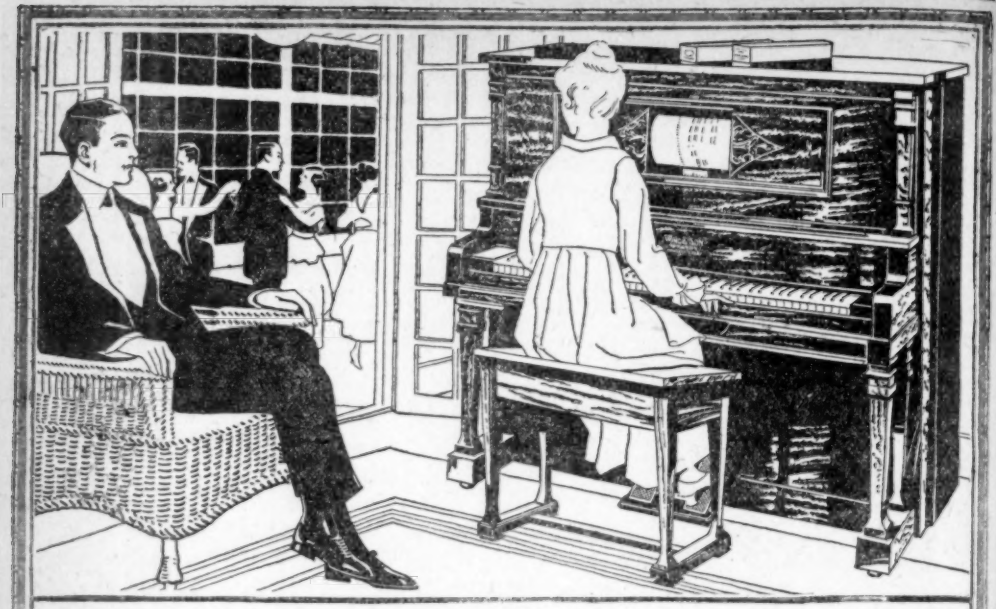

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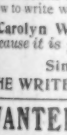

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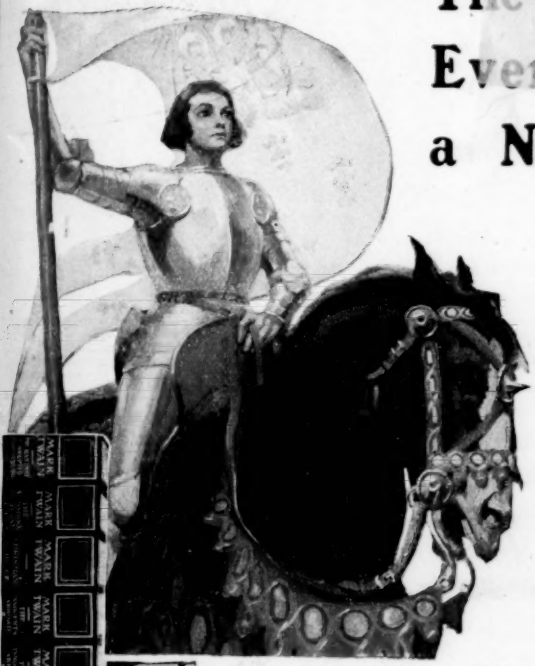
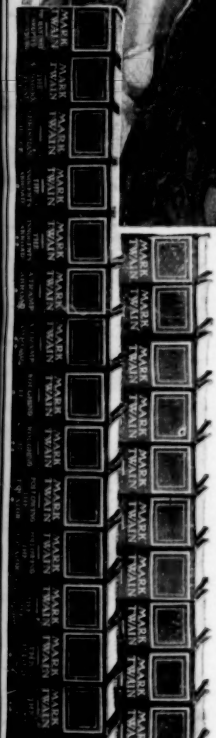


A simple little girl of sixteen played one day in a little lost village. The next year, in supreme command of all the troops of France, she led them in triumph to victory.

Great dukes bowed before this girl who could not read. Sinful men, men who had cursed and drank and murdered all their days, followed her meekly.

It is the most dramatic, the most amazing story in the whole story of human life. In the dim far-off past, Joan of Arc went her shining way in France—and her story was never told as it should have been till it was told by an American.

# MARK TWAIN



To us whose chuckles had turned to tears over the pathos of "Huckleberry Finn"—to us who felt the cutting edge of "Innocents Abroad"—th coming of Joan of Arc from the pen of Mark Twain was no surprise.

The story began as an anonymous romance in Harper's Magazine, but within a few months the secret was out. Who but Mark Twain could have written it? Who could have written this book that has almost the simplicity, the loftiness of the Bible—but with a whimsical touch which makes it human. Mark Twain's Joan of Arc is no cold statue in a church—no bronze on a pedestal, but a warm, human, loving girl.

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